

A paper of Marxist polemic and Marxist unity

weekly worker



**Jeremy Corbyn still wants to be
Your Party king and purge it of all
those pesky left activists**

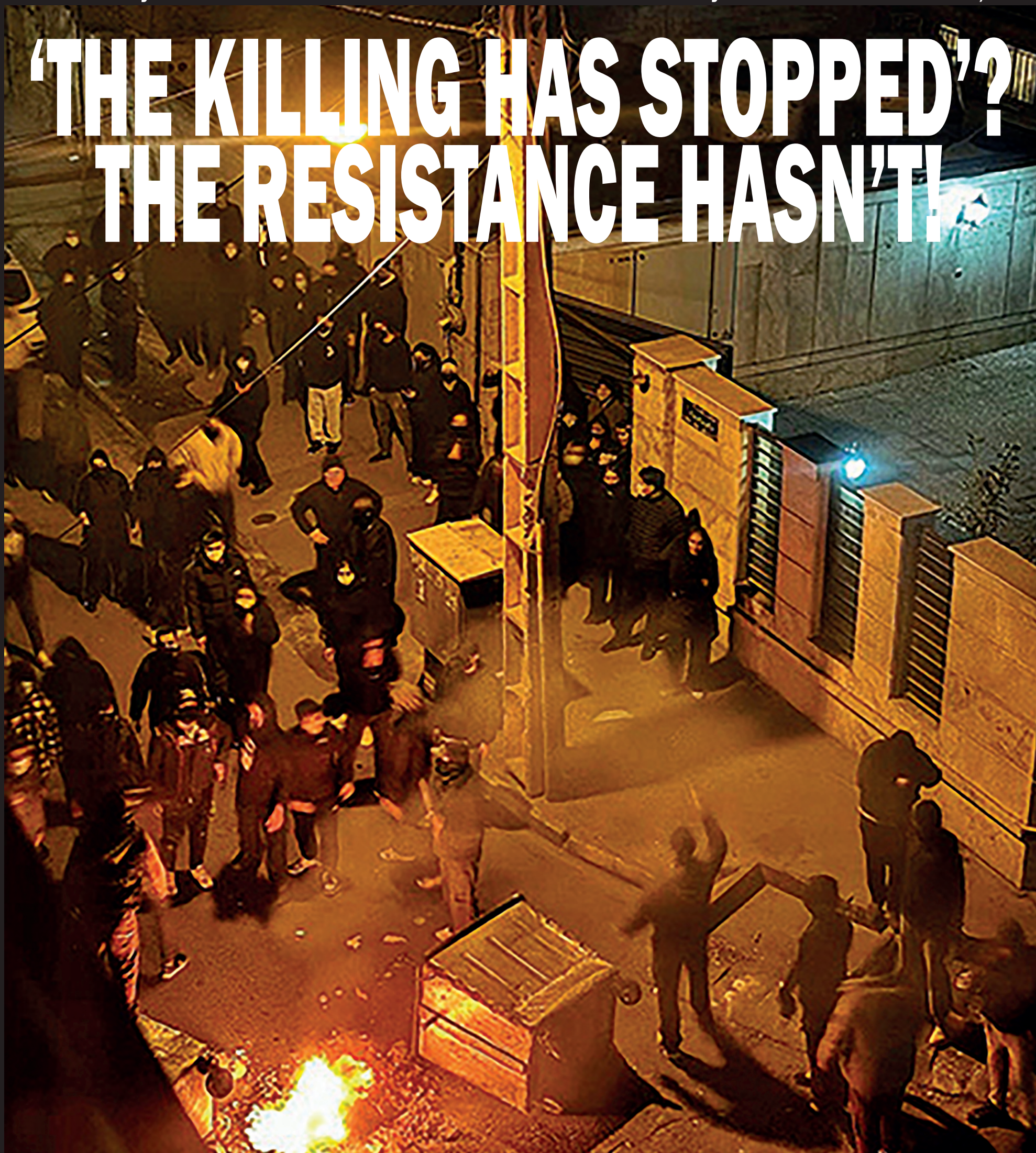
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Towards a mass Communist Party

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'THE KILLING HAS STOPPED'? THE RESISTANCE HASN'T!



LETTERS

 Letters may have been shortened because of space. Some names may have been changed

YP Scotland

Part and parcel of the problems still pouring forth from the bureaucratic clique at the top of Your Party is the anger it's brewing in Scotland. This is all going to gush forth at the February 7-8 Scottish conference in Dundee and it's no surprise that this is taking political form with a surge towards committing YP Scotland to backing independence as a country as well as a party.

In an attempt to present an alternative to this nationalist tide I'm taking part in an online debate with Richard Green, founder of the Platform for Socialism and Independence, in the evening of January 29. Whilst the separatist tide is high, despite the latest proof from Venezuela that attempts to build socialism in one country are delusive folly and can only bring suffering for the working class, there are comrades in Scotland recognising the need for unity and proletarian internationalism as the only way forward.

Gathering forces before conference as best we can without proper branch structures means taking every opportunity to offer such an alternative, and that's the hope for this debate.

Tam Dean Burn
Glasgow

Western fantasy

A photo supposedly showing a young woman in Iran lighting a cigarette with a burning image of Ayatollah Ali Khamenei has gone viral and is still doing the rounds, including in 'serious' papers such as *La Repubblica* here in Italy.

By now it has emerged that the woman lives in Canada and calls herself Morticia Addams, presumably in reference to the Addams Family character. The photo was taken in a parking lot

somewhere in Ontario, which makes her act of defiance seem rather less courageous than many imagined.

Some anti-imperialists have claimed that 'Morticia Addams' is a Zionist activist. At first glance, the posts on her no-longer-active X account (all written in Persian, but easily translated with DeepL) don't seem to confirm that - most appear to be purely feminist, talking about sexism, men's shortcomings, and so on. Others, however, have found older posts, where she wrote that "Palestine never existed" and was "just part of Israel" and, in reply to a critic/hater, that "being a whore of Netanyahu is much better than being a whore of what the media says about Palestine or any other Muslim". She added: "Did you bother to read the *Quran* even once?"

All in all, she doesn't strike me as some sophisticated Zionist activist or Hasbara troll. She's simply a right-leaning Iranian in exile, such as there are many, with a pro-west, anti-Islam stance. She mixes that with contemporary pop feminism. Her understandable opposition to the Iranian theocracy has taken the form of endorsing the genocidal Zionist project - regrettable, but not unusual.

The reason the photo went viral is that it happened to aesthetically play up to a western fantasy of how Iranian women rebel. This is also why 'Morticia Addams' has become the new poster girl for a certain crowd, which included German 'anti-fascists'.

And that is, as far as I can work out, all there is to it.

Maciej Zurowski
Italy

Don't be critical

The US attack on Venezuela, along with the kidnapping and forcible detention of president Nicolas Maduro that occurred on January 3, not only brings condemnation of the US, but teaches important lessons.

Surely Venezuela would never

have been attacked by the US imperialists if it had nuclear weapons? The development of a nuclear deterrent by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea and six nuclear tests by the DPRK have proved to be absolutely correct.

Only a day after the attack on Venezuela the DPRK tested a hypersonic missile. Respected comrade Kim Jong Un said: "To be honest, such activity of ours is clearly aimed at gradually putting the nuclear war deterrent on a highly developed basis. The reason why it is necessary is exemplified by the recent geopolitical crisis and complicated international events."

Another important lesson is that evidence has emerged that the attack on Venezuela was carried out with the help of internal traitors. The DPRK has always smashed internal traitors who were backed by outside forces: for example, in 1953, 1956, 1967 and 2013.

Moreover, before Venezuela was attacked, Maduro held talks with the US and even quoted John Lennon, saying "Give peace a chance". By contrast, whilst the DPRK has not entirely ruled out talks with the US, they have made it clear that they will not discuss denuclearisation with the US, so basically will not bargain over issues of principle. Trump had entertained hopes that he could meet comrade Kim Jong Un at the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation summit in south Korea last year, but came away without meeting the DPRK supreme leader.

It always amazes me how British leftists support socialist regimes that can be kicked over like a sandcastle by the imperialists, but baulk at supporting the DPRK, saying, "Ooh, we need to be critical!" Are such people worshippers of weakness?

Socialists, communists and anti-imperialists in Britain and elsewhere need to learn the lessons that the DPRK teaches.

Dermot Hudson
London

Cricket anyone?

Following on from a recent Facebook post on cricket and class, clearly there are lots of issues on this at grassroots level in England:

1. The selling off of council-owned pitches makes it difficult for local grassroots teams to find somewhere to play.
2. Work/shift patterns have changed, allied to childcare being more difficult/expensive. When I was much younger, many of the players would work days, Monday to Friday, but now many more people work weekends and shifts. Whilst I am not advocating women having traditional homemaker/mother roles, again in my early days it was much more likely that a cricketer's partner (and we need to be honest, that largely meant a female partner) took responsibility for childcare on evenings and weekends when matches were played. Add to this the privatisation of children's extra-curricular activities, which used to be handled by schools (another whole lot of detail to add there), but now players with children are often not available.
3. The demise of school sport, sale of playing fields, etc means

there are less younger people playing.

4. The demise of large workplaces with social/sports clubs attached has resulted in fewer teams.

In the 60s/70s as a kid we kicked footballs around all winter and smashed cricket balls around all summer in the field next to the council estate I grew up on. Most of that field, which had many council football pitches and lots of other space, is now fenced off and not public.

My secondary school (nowt posh) had a cricket team playing against other schools - we had a cricket pitch and an inter-house cricket competition. The school is now gone and the pitch is covered by a hospital car park.

When I worked for Imperial Chemical Industries, we had a social/sports club with two cricket pitches. We had three teams in the local midweek cricket league and two in the weekend league. There was an annual inter-department cricket competition too. But when ICI split up, the club and pitches went. The team I played for got sponsored, for a while, by ICI Surfactants, and we played on a council pitch. There were three pitches at that venue, but now they're all gone. There were another two council pitches at another venue in Middlesbrough, also now gone.

As those pitches disappeared, we moved around village cricket pitches and got sponsored by a

local microbrewery (which more than got their money back via post-match drinking). Eventually, with no young players coming through, we folded.

The Middlesbrough Midweek Cricket League then had eight divisions: it now has three. I switched to weekend cricket at Newton Aycliffe - a sports club with its own pitch, played with an array of wonderful and crazy people (there's summat in the Aycliffe air) and I'm glad they're still thriving today. I stopped playing weekends on fatherhood (my partner usually worked weekends and we had to cover childcare).

Cricket still exists at grassroots level. Locally it is sustained by villages and small towns, and in places like Middlesbrough largely remains, thanks to the efforts of the local population of south Asian descent taking up the reins of league administration and running teams. But there are many fewer working class players as a result of all that has happened over the last 50 years or so.

Ian Elcoate
Middlesbrough

X/Twitter threat

Keir Starmer's initial judgment that Peter Mandelson was the most diplomatic choice for ambassador to the United States makes both of them demonstrably unfit, and Lord Mandelson's

Online Communist Forum



Sunday January 18 5pm
No B2s over Iranian skies ... at least for the moment: political report from the CPGB's Provisional Central Committee and discussion

Use this link to register:
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Organised by CPGB: communistparty.co.uk and
Labour Party Marxists: www.labourpartymarxists.org.uk
For further information, email Stan Keable at
Secretary@labourpartymarxists.org.uk

A selection of previous Online Communist Forum talks can be viewed at: youtube.com/c/CommunistPartyofGreatBritain

Fighting fund

Help us get there!

After a brilliant final month in 2025, the first month of 2026 is looking rather different, when it comes to the *Weekly Worker* fighting fund. With exactly two weeks of January gone, as I write, we have not even managed to raise £1,000 towards our monthly £2,750 target.

True, we've received some handy donations - thanks to comrades PB (£80), DV and NH (£30 each) and PM and CC (£10). They all made their contributions in the shape of bank transfers or standing orders. Then there were a number of useful payments via PayPal - well done, comrades TB (£95), SVL and PM (£50 each), ST (£20), AB (£11), JV (£7), AR and SO (£5), plus £3 from comrade AH. Thank you, everyone!

All that comes to £406, taking our January running total up to a rather modest £991. So that means we need to step on the gas and hope that more of our supporters will help us out

in the second half of the month. Of course, the next 10 days or so are always the most fruitful, because that's when we get a few large standing orders, but, on their own, they won't be enough to see us home.

So please play your part if you can. The *Weekly Worker* depends on its readers for not just their political support, but financial support too. You can make a bank transfer, click on our PayPal button or even send us a cheque - yes, we still accept those!

Go to the web address below if you need more details - that's where you'll find the PayPal link too! We really do need to reach that £2,750 target each and every month, so please play your part ●

Robbie Rix

Our bank account details are
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continuing formal and informal role in public life is a far greater threat to our youth than anything on social media.

Like banning smartphones at the table, as we were banned from having personal stereos, it would be the simplest thing to ban smartphones from schools, which have always been used to call home, or be called, when necessary. But banning social media for under-16s would deny them the formative experience of their generation internationally, together with any ideology other than that of the schools and of the official media. The people who call for it in Britain want to lower the voting age to 16, having already raised the school leaving age to 18, while many of them also want conscription.

Sexualised images of children are not free speech, nor are non-consensual sexualised images of adults. The United States has no qualms about applying its legislation extraterritorially, and any company doing business here has to abide by our laws when doing so.

All of that said, the threat to X/ Twitter is pursuant to the Online Safety Act that was passed when Kemi Badenoch was secretary of state for business and trade - not the immediately responsible department, but not the furthest removed - and when the Conservative Party still delighted in the membership of several people who are now prominent in Reform UK, including Nadine Dorries, the secretary of state who introduced the bill.

At committee stage, the evidence of Hope Not Hate was given by Liron Woodcock-Velleman, who was then a well-connected Labour councillor in Barnet, but is now scandalously out on bail, awaiting sentence for offences including sending naked pictures of himself to a 13-year-old girl.

Elon Musk is the least of our worries.

David Lindsay
Lanchester

Wake up

May I proffer this sincere little New Year's message from a humble nobody to everyone on the genuinely Marxian left wing?

Well, yes, amazing, isn't it, how so *very* easily one can get left behind in terms of meaningful 'connection'? For instance, right now in how - apart from all other significant, but as such *predictable*, aspects of the kidnapping and removal of Maduro to the US - it represents how things have fundamentally changed in the new world order under Trumpism, including, of course, by leaving those on the revolutionary left high and dry, if continuing with stale and now instantly *even more* sterile debates. Maybe most notably this is around the strictly accurate or 'correct' definition of what constitutes fascism - where Trump's USA is nothing if not both an openly and proudly thuggish, mafioso-like, state gangster and therein at the very least *proto-fascistic* operator in world affairs.

Equally so exposed is how mainstream/bourgeois and even self-styled ultra-progressives are completely out of touch, politically undeveloped, trapped in generalised stagnancy. Rubio made things crystal-clear - plain as fucking daylight in that respect

- when pointing out how entities rooted within 'international diplomacy' are failing to understand how the military operation in Venezuela was not an old-school 'invasion' to secure total 'regime change', (ie, as per Iraq, Afghanistan or even Libya), but instead a method of securing cooperation and obedience as part of an albeit power-imposed alliance from *existing* elites from within the so-called Bolivarian revolution.

So, while those inordinately well-funded think tanks and suchlike 'independent' organisations for 'civil society', etc have been left behind - now utterly outdated and stagnant in perception and so only ever more *irrelevant*, Trumpism as such represents a freshness, 'modernity'. Certainly it's now in the intellectual and ideological driving seat of their ever more influential new world order, where Europe and the UK inexorably will follow.

Also to its both somewhat laughable and eternal shame, where a current times iteration of Marxism persists in that cyclical examination and reanalysis of matters, such as whether Trumpism represents 'fascism' or not, when the only real consideration - ie, the one of any actual *value* - is what type or variation or adapted form of fascism it is securing; how and why that surprisingly rather sophisticated 'hybridisation' from Trumpism is meeting the primary requirements of capitalism amidst its historically predictable global crisis; most specifically right now, how America and Trumpism are enacting policies derived from 19th century British imperialism's cunning and astute coopting, coercing, maintaining in India of local potentates to efficiently enable - aka to run - its raj!

And then, of course, there's what to do about all this from between the various Trotskyism-rooted versions and multiple others, in turn amidst a nothing short of *ludicrous* multiple fragmentation of our revolutionist forces as a whole. In short then, comrades: 'modernise or die' - or, more precisely put - otherwise we remain 'vestigial'. The new way things are working in the big, wide world is staring us in the face. Trumpism has moved everything on, and they will change again, leaving the organisations of the international working class only further withering on the vine, as those vestigial appendages to a nonetheless still ongoing, nascent class struggle.

So in summary: wake up, comrades: it's still not too late before those Gestapo techniques of ICE and Homeland Security and those almost surreally high-tech covert interventions in its geographical backyard, etc become applied further beyond the USA to our own 'sovereign' nation-state bourgeois governments. Nitpicking and internecine fragmentation of our forces won't present any solution - any attractive and *inspirational* alternative for those proverbial masses of culturally and aesthetically imprisoned, tragically conditioned and controlled, bribed, distracted and manipulated, commandeered and coopted, to those quite simply lost co-citizens of ours.

Bruno Kretzschmar
email

Tehran bus workers: 'No return to past'



Sepideh Jodeyri writes: In the protests that gave rise to the current uprising in Iran, the perspectives of labour activists should have been central. Instead, because they ran against the dominant currents of warmongering and Pahlavi monarchist nostalgia, their voices were marginalised in both the Persian-language and international media. As usual, attention was lavished on Iranian figures who openly justify war and are funded by the United States and Israel, or on those who - offering no principled opposition to foreign intervention, monarchist reaction, separatism or the Mujahedin - treat the mere overthrow of the existing government as a universal remedy. For this reason, and in order to make clear to a global audience that these views are far from universal, we aim to amplify the voices of labour activists in Iran. We ask you, at least once, to listen to a different voice: one emerging from the deepest experiences of suffering, exploitation and class oppression:

Popular protests and strikes across cities throughout the country have now gone on for two weeks. Despite an intensified security crackdown, the heavy deployment of police and security forces, and widespread violence against protestors, the movement remains broad, dynamic and diverse. According to reports, protests have taken place at no fewer than 174 locations in 60 cities across 25 provinces, with hundreds of demonstrators arrested. Tragically, at least 35 protestors - including children - have been killed during this period.

From December 2017 to November 2019, and again in September 2022, Iran's oppressed people have repeatedly taken to the streets to demonstrate their rejection of the prevailing political and economic order and its structures of exploitation and inequality. These movements are not driven by nostalgia for the past, but by the determination to build a future free from the domination of capital - one grounded in freedom, equality, social justice and human dignity.

While expressing our solidarity with popular struggles against poverty, unemployment,

discrimination and repression, we categorically oppose any return to a past marked by inequality, corruption and injustice. We believe that genuine liberation can only be achieved through the conscious, organised leadership and participation of the working class and oppressed people themselves - not through the revival of outdated and authoritarian forms of power.

Workers, teachers, retirees, nurses, students, women and especially young people - despite mass repression, arrests, dismissals and relentless economic hardship - continue to stand at the forefront of these struggles. In this context, the Syndicate of Workers of Tehran and Suburbs Bus Company (Vahed) stresses the necessity of sustaining independent, conscious and organised forms of protest.

We have stated repeatedly, and we reaffirm once again: the path to liberation for workers and the oppressed does not lie in the imposition of leaders from above, nor in reliance on foreign powers, nor through factions within the ruling establishment. It lies in unity, solidarity and the building of independent organisations in

workplaces, communities and at the national level. We must not allow ourselves to once again become victims of power struggles and the interests of the ruling classes.

Vahed also strongly condemns any promotion, justification or support for military intervention by foreign governments, including the United States and Israel. Such interventions lead not only to the destruction of civil society and the killing of civilians, but also provide further pretexts for repression and violence by the state. Past experience has shown that western hegemonic powers place no value whatsoever on the freedom, livelihoods or rights of the Iranian people.

We demand the immediate and unconditional release of all detainees and insist on the identification and prosecution of those responsible for ordering and carrying out the killing of protestors.

Long live freedom, equality and class solidarity. The path forward for workers and the oppressed is unity and organisation ●

Syndicate of Workers of Tehran and Suburbs Bus Company (Vahed)

IRAN

Reject all dead ends

We support the mass protests against the dictatorial regime, writes **Yassamine Mather**. However, we must also intransigently oppose Trump's threat of US intervention and any kind of return of the monarchy



As readers will know, the current wave of protests in Iran began with bazaar merchants mobilising against the collapsing rial, rampant inflation and the deepening cost-of-living crisis.¹ They were quickly joined by wider layers of the population confronting the unbearable economic realities. As in every dictatorship - and Iran is no exception - economic protest rapidly became political. The slogans shifted decisively: "Death to the dictator", calls for the clerics to leave the country, and open rejection of the regime as a whole. That dynamic has continued ever since.

On January 8, the Islamic Republic responded by imposing a nationwide shutdown of internet and phone access. This did not, as the regime may have hoped, prevent images and short clips from reaching the outside world. What it did achieve was far more insidious: it choked the flow of information from inside the country and distorted the picture internationally. By January 11, even phone lines were cut. The internet blackout created a vacuum in which misinformation flourished. On January 9 and 10 in particular, fake news surged.

Fabrication and disinformation were already present, as I noted last week. But the blackout dramatically amplified their impact. It produced a grotesquely misleading portrayal of Reza Pahlavi, son of the last shah before the 1979 Islamic revolution, in international coverage. With most

Iranians silenced, the narrative space was monopolised by a tiny, privileged layer with access to Starlink - socially better-off and mainly sympathetic to reactionary, monarchist alternatives. Western media, eager for a simplistic storyline and politically conditioned to believe that "protests must have a leader", swallowed this hook, line and sinker. The result was an extraordinary and wholly artificial media blitz around Pahlavi.

This was no coincidence. It was the product of a well-oiled publicity operation, widely reported months earlier - including in *Haaretz* - as a Mossad-linked media campaign. Yet, during the blackout, western outlets rushed to amplify it, recycling content uncritically and presenting Pahlavi as a credible figurehead for a movement he does not represent.

Consequently, the blackout coincided with a flood of fabricated videos and doctored audios promoting Pahlavi. Unlike the previous week - when protestors inside Iran had systematically exposed these forgeries - ordinary Iranians were now deprived of the means to respond. They could no longer upload side-by-side comparisons showing the real chants from demonstrations - anti-dictatorship, anti-regime, anti-shah - alongside the falsified, Mossad-manufactured, monarchist versions circulated abroad.

Let me be absolutely clear: a vast section of

Imperial family of Iran at the coronation of Shah Mohammad Reza in 1967

The well-financed idea of Reza Pahlavi heading a united opposition and returning to Iran to oversee a smooth transition to democracy is risible



those risking their lives in the streets despise the Islamic Republic - but they also despise the shah and everything he represented. Before the blackout, they made this unmistakably clear themselves. The silence imposed by the regime did not erase that reality: it merely allowed others to speak over it.

This is the continuation of years of activity by Mossad. They show a very large number of supporters for Pahlavi social media accounts and generate a vile, rude response as soon as you publish anything against the ex-shah or his son. If you are an Iranian and you defend the Palestinians and write against Zionism or against Pahlavi on social media, you are bombarded with slogans, accusations of supporting the Islamic Republic, and, not to forget, death threats. After a while, you realise these are bots, because you see the same comments under other posts with similar views.

Most Iranians consider the monarchy to have been corrupt, elitist and imposed by force through a CIA coup. Even the Iranian aristocracy did not like it, considering them a bunch of ignorant *nouveaux riches*.

The failures of the current dictatorship - in terms of corruption, the rentier economy and the existence of a massive gap between the rich and the poor - mean that a small portion of the population (mainly those who do not know much about Iran's recent history) have accepted the relentless propaganda by

Israeli- and Saudi-financed satellite TV stations and have developed nostalgia for that period. However, this is not as widespread as sections of the western media claim.

In fact, it is only Pahlavi's grandfather, Reza Shah, who has some credibility, as the father of the country's modernisation. However, those who support him have forgotten that he came to power via a British coup and was deposed in 1942 by the Allies because of his sympathies and cooperation with Hitler.

This week, someone asked me, "What is your assessment of Pahlavi's proposed 100-day plan for an interim administration?" My reply was that this is daydreaming. Unlike Israel, Trump is not keen on him (I am not sure why). If he is imposed through regime change or a coup (ie, if Israel convinces Trump), he will not last 100 days.

So far, he has not even managed to keep his inner circle of 10-12 people. They have all appeared in videos and interviews over the last few months, exposing their personal behaviour and shortcomings.

US and Israel

Now, obviously, we have come to a stage which is changed dramatically from the first week or so of the protests into a much more violent situation. There are different accusations from both sides in terms of the level of violence and the number of victims.

The reformist president, Masoud

Pezeshkian, gave an interview on January 11, in which he said that Mossad agents had infiltrated the demonstrations, set fire to mosques and the Rasht Bazaar, and claimed that they had even beheaded people during demonstrations to create terror. On January 12, Hamid Dabashi, professor of Iranian studies at Columbia University, told Al Jazeera TV: “Mossad agents are hiding among Iranian demonstrators.”

There is no doubt that Israel has physical spies and agents in Iran, and uses them, in addition to AI and bots, in the same way that the Islamic Republic of Iran has agents in Israel and uses hacking and AI to damage the Zionist state. However, even if some Mossad agents acted as *agents provocateurs* in the protests, no-one watching the videos, before or after the internet blackout, can be in any doubt that hundreds of thousands of Iranians are very angry. They are not Mossad agents! I am sure many young Iranians would not hesitate to set fire to mosques if they could. They hate the mosque because it represents religious repression.

At this stage, given the blackout, it is very difficult to be precise about how many people have been killed. The so-called human rights organisations quoted by the BBC, CNN and others are not reliable. Many are funded by neoconservative US Republicans. Having said that, there is no doubt that the Islamic Republic has used extreme violence against the demonstrators. I do not think anyone who has followed the four and a half decades of Islamic Republic rule has any doubts that it is capable of unleashing absolute terror against its own population.

Social repression has been slightly moderated in terms of women’s clothing, but many aspects of it remain. Political repression is very strong - we know that. Even if you run a website that publishes leftwing articles - which was tolerated during a certain period - in recent months, they have arrested people associated with such activity. If you are a worker demanding unpaid wages, you are likely to end up in prison, as many bus company workers have. If you are a woman who continues to fight for ‘Women, Life, Freedom’, you might end up in prison. And so on.

One thing that seems clear is that the regime is still reluctant to use the army; instead it is relying on the Revolutionary Guards and the basij - a kind of Islamic militia. Why would they not use the army? They might later, but at this stage I think that, for people like the supreme leader, doing that would be too close to a repetition of the way the shah dealt with similar protests in 1978-79. That history, that background - and the fact that they may not fully trust everyone in the army, despite closer connections with the Revolutionary Guards - has so far stopped them going for that option. However, if these protests continue, we do not know what will happen.

And you have to remember that this cycle of violence creates more violence. Suppose, say, 100 people are killed - or perhaps fewer. There will be burial ceremonies for these people. Today, I noticed reports that a three-year-old child was killed in Carmel Shores. There was a huge demonstration, although the government claims that it was the protestors who killed the child! Regardless, there was a popular manifestation of anger. There will be similar outpouring at every funeral, and this will culminate - if we look at the history of 1979 - in bigger and bigger demonstrations.

The main problem for the regime is that, unlike during the Women, Life, Freedom movement, when major concessions were made regarding the compulsory hijab - it cannot do much to improve the economy unless it accepts all of Trump’s terms

for a ‘deal’. The economy cannot be reformed, and attempts by the Pezeshkian government to reform the exchange rates for the dollar - one for the state and the IRGC, another for the market and ordinary Iranians - did not work.

By January 12, the religious state had managed to impose a degree of control. We saw well-organised, state-sponsored, pro-government demonstrations in major cities to downplay the continuing nationwide protest movement. Tens of thousands attended these demonstrations. However, this tactic is one of the few weapons left for the regime.

State TV on January 12 showed crowds of people streaming through the streets of Tehran, before gathering in Enghelab Square for the ‘Iranian uprising against American-Zionist terrorism’ rally. There, they listened to a speech by the speaker of parliament, Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf, who railed against western intervention. Ghalibaf said Iran was fighting a four-front war: an “economic war, psychological warfare, a military war against the US and Israel, and today a war against terrorism”.

Of course, the US and Israel want regime change in Iran. However, despite Trump threatening military intervention and the media frenzy this created, that has not happened yet. Of course, it could happen at any time, but why have we not seen a US or Israeli military attack so far? One reason is that the US president’s advisors have told him that such an intervention could risk ending the protests, because an attack on a country inevitably makes people defensive of their country, as happened in June 2025 during the 12-day war. There is also the fact that, in the last couple of weeks, someone has reminded Trump of the US failures to rescue the hostages held in the Tehran embassy in the early 1980s. He mentioned the botched operations of the Carter era after the kidnapping of Venezuelan president Nicolás Maduro in Caracas. He is concerned that a failure to kill or capture Khamenei or other senior Iranian leaders might backfire.

Last week, Trump gave his excuses on Fox News for why US military force had not been used: “Quite a lot of these people who’ve died weren’t actually killed by the regime. That’s why we can’t intervene. They were killed in stampedes. There were large crowds and they were killed.” This is exactly the excuse used by the Islamic Republic. At that time, he was repeating Islamic Republic claims because his advisors were calculating various ways of dealing with the situation. I would argue that some of these threats are part of his negotiating tactics.

Beginning of end?

Supporters of the regime claim there will be no military intervention, because the US is afraid of Iran closing the Strait of Hormuz, almost stopping oil flows, or because of Iran’s missile capabilities. This is nonsense: clearly the US and even Israel on its own has air superiority and does not fear Iranian retaliation. As far as I can tell, the US is pursuing three simultaneous options for replacing the Islamic Republic and is carefully calculating its approach. Trump is often presented as an idiot who jumps into things, but I think he is actually more calculating, when it comes to long-term plans.

The pro-shah forces are mainly concentrated in the western and southern provinces, and Mossad is clearly active there. It is quite clear that Netanyahu - having met Pahlavi and having overseen almost two and a half years of close association between Zionist supporters and pro-shah supporters outside Iran - sees this as an opportunity to create a pro-Zionist regime in the Middle East that he can support. However, this is not

necessarily the policy being pursued by Trump.

The Trump administration is also closely connected with sections of the Kurdish opposition, which is anti-Pahlavi and not royalist. We saw this clearly in videos from Kurdish cities, where very strong anti-Pahlavi slogans were being shouted during demonstrations. This ‘coalition’ includes the Kurdish Democratic Party of Iran, which has some significance, and a faction of the Komala organisation that is not involved in the royalist camp. However, there are also rumours that the Trump administration is involved in negotiations - and plots with some figures inside the regime - for what is described as a ‘smooth transfer of power’, possibly echoing its Venezuela strategy.

Remove Khamenei

The problem with this scenario is that the demonstrators want ayatollah Khamenei removed. He is unlikely to leave voluntarily. He is not the kind of leader who would step aside to save the Islamic Republic, and his immediate security apparatus appears extremely difficult to penetrate. There has been speculation, including in *The Times*, about figures such as Ali Larijani, the former parliamentary speaker, a former IRGC officer and current secretary of the Supreme National Security Council, as someone who might oversee a “smooth transition” of power. He has grievances against the regime, including the fact that he was blocked as a presidential candidate by the Council of Guardians more than once. However, I do not see him as someone who would rebel against the supreme leader.

I guess that a collapse among regime supporters will only occur if protests continue, but the last few days have been relatively quiet. If protests resume on the scale we saw last week, regime insiders might decide to work with the Trump administration to ensure a managed transition to a military Islamic state, primarily to avoid war. But this is speculation: we simply do not know.

The question of the survival of the Islamic Republic has been posed many times, and the regime’s ability to suppress dissent, re-invent itself and compromise when necessary is in no doubt. But the present crisis is different. Several factors - profound economic distress, a plummeting currency, severely eroded political legitimacy, external threats and what looks like institutional fatigue - are putting unprecedented strain on the system, making its long-term future more precarious than before.

That is why we hear predictions varying from imminent downfall to arguments for its continued survival, eroded existence or a transformation short of total collapse. BBC Persian has looked at a variety of views on this issue, and I have summarised and translated some of these:

■ Economy and livelihoods: a catalyst or a structural determinant? While the protests started over economic hardship, they escalated into overt calls for systemic change, proving that the economy is not merely an ignition point, but a structural reality that broadens dissent, while crippling the state’s capacity to offer substantive relief. Javad Salehi-Isfahani of Virginia Tech suggests that, even if the regime endures, its survival will be “erosive, unstable and marked by recurring crises”. He contrasts the current moment with 2022, when the government could offer low-cost social concessions. Now, with a broken economy and currency collapse at the core of grievances, the state lacks credible tools for rapid stabilisation. The only viable pressure valve - reducing external tensions - is far more costly and complex than social compromises.

Michael Doran of the Hudson

Institute agrees, asserting that the confluence of economic failure, lost legitimacy and weakened deterrence has brought the regime to a juncture where ‘survival’ may not entail preserving the current system. He envisages three potential scenarios: collapse via elite fracture; an “incomplete transformation” with new leadership; or erosive survival through repression. In all cases, a return to the pre-crisis status quo is deemed impossible.

■ Repression and power: the cohesion of the security apparatus. So far, despite the scale of the protests, no-one can deny the unity and obedience of the security forces, particularly the IRGC and basij. In the absence of such fragmentation, and at this stage ruling out foreign military intervention, protests alone will not bring down the regime. However, the IRGC is both the ultimate pillar of regime survival and a symptom of critical vulnerability. Continued instability and casualties could test its cohesion. Vali Nasr of Johns Hopkins University argues that the regime is trapped, unable to repress without great cost or to retreat meaningfully. This creates paralysis at the top, exacerbated by economic crisis and the risk of foreign intervention. While immediate collapse is not likely, a return to past stability is also impossible. Some predict an ‘erosive ending’ - not necessarily a sudden fall, but a gradual decay of governing capacity, political cohesion and effective power. Survival, if it occurs, is forecast to be fragile, costly and increasingly unstable.

In terms of non-Pahlavi positions, there has been a strong campaign by the right. The British foreign office appears particularly favourable to Pahlavi. If you saw the recent demonstration in London, you will have noticed that protestors were allowed to climb above the embassy balcony, remove the official Iranian flag and replace it with the royalist flag. Compare this with the level of protection given to the Israeli embassy, where demonstrators were not allowed anywhere near. It is therefore clear that there is significant sympathy for Pahlavi at official levels.

We have seen Zionist-aligned Labour ministers repeating what Benjamin Netanyahu wants them to say: open support for Pahlavi. The BBC is now in an awkward position and, in my view, has broadcast fake videos without adequate warnings. Last week, when people were posting fake videos next to the real ones - where crowds were chanting anti-shah slogans - the BBC aired those comparisons. This week, it has not. I guess that the BBC is under pressure from the foreign office, but also that royalist and Mossad-linked publicity efforts have been highly effective.

Royalists used to call the BBC “Ayatollah BBC” (much like the *Daily Express* calls it leftwing!). Because the BBC is institutionally weak and sensitive to such accusations, it has overcorrected. I should not say too much here: I refused an invitation to speak on BBC Persian on January 13, but perhaps I should have pushed harder.

Class forces

The mainstream press insists that movements require figureheads. As a result, two bourgeois-liberal opposition blocs have emerged, as they inevitably do in periods of upheaval. Neither deserves support.

The first is associated with Shirin Ebadi and a reactionary, pro-Zionist faction of Kurdish politics around the Komala party in Iranian Kurdistan, as well as former supporters of Pahlavi who have fallen out with him. Inevitably, this alliance supports foreign intervention. It lacks legitimacy inside Iran: it is seen as elite-driven, western-oriented and with a limited chance of getting

anywhere.

The second bloc is led by the Nobel laureate Narges Mohammadi and, more importantly, by filmmaker Jafar Panahi and former reformist Mostafa Tajzadeh. Their initial statement made no mention of opposition to US intervention or Israeli genocide. I am informed that they are under pressure to revise this, and they may well do so, but it remains a bourgeois alternative that offers nothing to the working class.

What about the working class then? There are now six or seven leaflets issued by workers’ organisations. These groups are very clear: they support the protests; they have been saying for years that wages are unpaid and living conditions are unbearable; and, when they protest, they are arrested. But they are equally clear that they oppose foreign intervention. They reject the old shah, whose regime was as corrupt and unequal as the current one.

This includes the bus workers, who issued a long statement that has appeared on many websites. Former oil workers - who were striking for months with little media coverage, due, in part, to the fragmented structure of the industry - have also issued statements. There are the sugar-cane workers too, who have been protesting for years. New formations have emerged as well, including the Electricity and Metal Workers Association and the Council for Organising Contract Oil Workers.

Unlike in 1979, it is extremely difficult to organise a nationwide oil strike. Neoliberal policies and privatisation have fragmented the industry into hundreds of contractors. However, organisers are trying to adapt. Their voices are ignored by British and US media, but they were prominently represented at solidarity demonstrations in Berlin and Stockholm, where anti-Pahlavi and anti-intervention slogans dominated.

What does this mean for the immediate future? It is very difficult to say. Repression over the last few days has been severe, and it takes immense courage to protest, while unarmed, against such a brutal regime. Calls for US military intervention actively deter participation, because people do not want Iran destroyed like Iraq or Libya. The comparison may not be exact, but the fear is real and widespread.

Donald Trump has announced that any country that continues trading with Iran will face a 25% tariff on all its exports to the US. We do not have details of how that would be enforced; however, if Iran’s economic partners reduce trade to avoid US tariffs, Iran’s exports and foreign exchange earnings could fall further (especially oil and petrochemicals), squeezing the country’s revenue, and there will be more protests, even if they are temporarily suppressed.

What can we do? We must, above all else, condemn and campaign against any foreign intervention. It will be the Iranian people who will pay the price of military attacks, air raids, etc. We must show solidarity with the Iranian people, not the Iranian state. We must amplify the voices of independent working class organisations - bus workers, oil workers, sugar-cane workers - and break the false binary between the Islamic Republic and the shah.

Finally, a word on responsibility. The international left is rightly horrified by the re-emergence of royalist slogans. But we must also place responsibility where it belongs. It is the corruption, inequality and betrayal of the 1979 revolution by the Islamic Republic that has allowed such reactionary nostalgia to resurface ●

Notes

1. ‘Divided regime, divided opposition’ *Weekly Worker* January 8 2026: weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1567/divided-regime-divided-opposition.

YOUR PARTY

Off to a bumpy start

Carla Roberts urges the Grassroots Left slate to change track, open up and reject calls for confidentiality and secrecy. Transparency is not a weakness, but a strength

On January 11, the Grassroots Left slate was officially launched¹, presenting a joint programme and a set of candidates for the Your Party central executive committee elections. We support the slate and urge readers and supporters to endorse and then vote for the GL candidates in their regions ... and get involved in local and regional campaign activities.

Without a *joint* left challenge, there is a real danger that very few socialists will get onto the leadership body. This is in part because of the requirement to get 75 regional nominations. Each member is able to endorse two candidates in their region. We also suspect that the chosen single transferable (STV) system will not allow for a *real* transfer of votes between candidates. For this reason, we also call on any socialists who are standing as 'independents' to withdraw their candidacy and to get behind the GL slate.

We are not without criticisms of both the programme and the campaign. For example, the fact that the manifesto does not commit to campaign for MPs on a worker's wage is worrying. As was Zarah Sultana's answer, when asked about it - not once, but twice, at a recent public meeting: "This is ultimately a decision that the members should be taking at the party's next conference."² (Roger Silverman responded quite correctly from the floor: "With all due comradeship and respect, this is a cop-out.") This remains a tell-tale weakness in comrade Sultana's programme. A workers' MP on a skilled workers' wage remains an important *principle* of the workers' movement. It is no empty slogan, but goes to the heart of the kind of party - and future society - we want to build. One without special privileges for special members. With elected representatives who actually know what those they represent are going through. We suspect this argument will be revisited.

There are other problems. It is fair to say that the campaign had a slightly rocky start. And we are not talking about the eight hours delay, when it came to the launch of the website and the release of a first video introducing some of the candidates. Such technical issues are unavoidable. But there were - and remain - a number of entirely avoidable problems. These might look like organisational issues, but they are, when it comes down to it, very much political questions.

It is excellent that the launch video was watched over 400,000 times in the first 24 hours - there clearly is an appetite for a radical, democratic and socialist trend in YP. But it is also true that many members were entirely surprised by the existence of the slate and still have no idea how it came about, how the candidates were selected or how Jeremy Corbyn ended up on it, featuring at the top of a webpage entitled 'Our candidates'.

We had a wild 20 hours, where Corbyn's right hand woman Karie Murphy feverishly phoning some of the candidates on the GL slate, pleading and threatening them to remove themselves. She also informed that bulwark of socialism, the *New Statesman*, that "Corbyn didn't give permission for his name to be used on this slate and a specific request was put in that his name was not included. Sources said Corbyn is 'very upset' that this was done without his



Zarah Sultana and Craig Lloyd, the joint campaign director

consent."³ The website was eventually changed to reflect that Corbyn is just one of the candidates that the platform *endorses*, but is not a part of the slate.

The same 'special treatment' now unfortunately also goes for Naomi Wimborne-Idrissi (Platform for a Democratic Party, standing in the South East) as well as Counterfire member and Preston councillor, Michael Lavalette, who is standing for the 'public officers section' on the CEC. Both have agreed to be *endorsed* by the slate, but do not stand on its political platform and do not endorse all candidates in it.

Many YP members will wonder how we got to this point. Some - most of them readers of the *Weekly Worker* - will at least know that both used to be involved in the attempts to cohere a joint slate, but they will have no idea that they exited the negotiations.

Unfortunately, there is no explanation coming from the slate itself. A mistake. We should be open and frank about disagreements. For a start, it is almost impossible to stop these things from coming out anyway. After both were featured as 'Our candidates', comrades Wimborne-Idrissi and Lavalette issued public statements distancing themselves from the slate - not a good turn, to put it mildly: an avoidable own goal.

Confidentiality

The Grassroots Left campaign has been dominated by an admirable attempt to look as professional and snazzy as possible. Nothing wrong with that. Much of the left in Britain seems to revel in its amateurishness. Where things do go wrong, though,

is when a form of 'professionalism' is implemented that takes inspiration from *bourgeois* political campaigns. Yes, for those kinds of campaigns, running an extremely tight ship with strict hierarchical structures and sharply defined posts, like 'head of strategy', 'head of field operations', 'head of comms', etc, makes sense. Such campaigns come, naturally, with media embargoes, and soft and hard launches when the programme or candidates are eventually 'revealed' to the lucky members. Such a campaign certainly would see no need to report openly about disagreements, or, for that matter, feel under any obligation to explain how the slate even came about.

The eagle-eyed reader will have picked up that we disagree with this approach, but it has been adopted by the Grassroots Left. For a start, we are dealing with a YP membership that has been hugely alienated by the control-freakery and strict firewalls enforced by Karie Murphy. Copying that approach, but on a lower level, seems to us entirely the wrong way to go about things - and obviously self-defeating. No wonder the launch of the GL slate has been met with what can only be described as 'muted' levels of enthusiasm. Clearly, something is not going right and we have to be frank and open about where the problem might be.

But we were repeatedly 'asked' not to report about the problems and even the negotiations. We have been told that we have already "broken confidentiality" and "discipline" by "leaking" the political platform and the names of the chosen candidates

before the 'big launch' on January 11. We are not surprised about councillor James Giles (head of communications) making such demands - he is an ambitious young man, who previously worked for George Galloway, then for Ayoub Khan MP and has now switched to Zarah Sultana.

Information

Appeals for confidentiality and secrecy from an organisation like the Democratic Socialists of Your Party, however, are another matter. For a start, this flatly contradict their own stated views. It argues, in its 'Points of unity', for exa Information ctly the opposite approach: "Members must have the right to freedom of information, association, discussion, dissent and the freedom to critique the party's programme and organise to change it".⁴ It quite rightly emphasises issues like accountability, transparency and, as they put it, the need for a "party republic".

Excellent points - which correctly oppose what much of the left hold as 'common sense': secrecy, confidentiality and keeping things from the membership (or the wider working class for that matter), supposedly because they would just get too confused. That goes not only for 'the sects', that the DSYP derides: the same was a huge problem, for example, in Left Unity, which quickly oppose what much of the left hold as 'common sense': secrecy, confidentiality and keeping things from the membership (or the wider working class for that matter), supposedly because they would just get too confused. That goes not only for 'the sects', that the DSYP derides: the same was a huge problem, for example, in Left Unity, which quickly

being bullied by Murphy.⁶ She still operates like that at YP headquarters, of course.

We applaud efforts to consciously work against that culture - as exemplified, for example, by Anwarul Khan, a former participant in the secret Collective meetings on behalf of the recently dissolved party, Transform. He now publishes the full transcripts of all meetings organised by the Your Party Connections Network he has set up - including, funnily enough, one in which guest speaker Karie Murphy repeatedly asked not to be quoted (we are happily linking once again to the full amusing transcript here, in which she also outlines her desire to keep out "the Marxist sects"). Comrade Khan, incidentally, is a candidate on the Grassroots Left slate in the East Midlands. He might be no Marxist, but clearly deserves praise for his ongoing campaign for transparency, which we hope he will continue if elected onto the CEC.

The reason the *Weekly Worker* publishes critical reports of such disputes is not because we want to satisfy gossip-hungry readers; nor, as has been claimed, because we want to "harm" either the GL slate or DSYP. Quite the opposite: we are absolutely certain that, if they do not practise what they preach, both will eventually fail.

Transparency, openness, accountability - these are not just fine words. They are absolutely crucial tools that we need in the fight for socialism. And it is not enough to demand that the state, the BBC, the council, etc, adhere to openness. We must do so ourselves: there is not just the small

matter of Stalinism hanging over our movement; real accountability of our leaders is of the utmost importance in the fight for a truly democratic, socialist society. If the working class is to become the ruling class of society in order to liberate all of humanity, then we really have to stop treating people like children. The mass of the working class is not going to join a party or a campaign that views them as incapable of understanding our arguments or disagreements. And real accountability cannot be achieved without real transparency and openness.

There is another issue: without openly discussing not just our disagreements, but also the *mistakes* we have made, they are bound to be repeated. And there have, yes, been quite a few mistakes. None of them are irreversible and none of them are fatal, but, unless we are open about them, they could well become so. When it comes to politics and political differences, confidentiality and secrecy are weapons of the bosses and bureaucrats - and we should have nothing to do with them.

It is in this spirit of comradely criticism that we are covering developments in the Grassroots Left slate and Your Party in general. No doubt we make mistakes too, none on purpose - and all easily corrected by sending a letter to the *Weekly Worker* (editor@weeklyworker.co.uk).

More departures

Last week, we reported the departure of the small Organising for Popular Power (O4PP) and the Democratic Bloc from Grassroots Left. Neither will be standing candidates in the elections, but they may end up endorsing this or that candidate from either slate, and perhaps some independents too. Luckily, the departure of neither group nor their voting recommendations will make much of a difference.

The Democratic Bloc - until five short weeks ago a relatively important and certainly a very glossy player in Your Party - has all but dissolved. As we predicted last week, their leading member, Mish Rahman, has joined the Green Party - Zack Polanski is very welcome to this arch opportunist and careerist, who made no impact at all as a member of Labour's NEC, where he was more than keen to keep his head down. As vice-chair of Momentum, he loyally implemented the witch-hunting constitution of Jon Lansman. The same goes, incidentally, for Hilary Schan, another loyal vice-chair of Momentum, who resigned in April 2024. She is standing for the CEC in the South East, probably on the Corbyn slate (if there is one). We will be looking at all candidates in future editions.

The Democratic Bloc has now started a 'consultation', asking its members how they "wish for the Democratic Bloc to progress". Option 1 - carry on to "function as a campaigning organisation within the context of Your Party". Option 2 - do it "within Your Party, the Green Party and other relevant sites of struggle". Option 3 - "The Democratic Bloc will transition into a period of strategic pause". Brilliant. It does not take a genius to predict that option 3 will win, whichever option gets the most votes, and that the DemBloc will be strategically 'pausing' itself into oblivion. Good riddance. It was always just a holding group for a select number of unprincipled Momentum-type careerists, who happily participated in Karie Murphy's secretive Organising Group. Rahman and co only discovered their love for democracy after Murphy closed it down last year.

The departure of Counterfire, and Ken Loach's Platform for a Democratic Party, however, are more serious matters. Both were avoidable, in our view. So, why did they leave



Jeremy Corbyn: still wants to be king of the castle

Grassroots Left? Neither group has published an official statement (yet), but we have been in contact with a number of participants in the GLS negotiations.

No doubt, both groups did not much like the political platform of the campaign.⁸ But, because it was drafted by Zarah Sultana (with "input" from Max Shanly) and because time was running out, they reluctantly signed up, when it was presented to the GLS working group on January 2. Both had previously presented their own short platforms, which were altogether inferior to the Sultana-Shanly one. But, contrary to reports circulating - in the DSYP in particular - we don't believe that this is the only or even the main reason why they left.

After all, both attended the meeting on January 4 (ie, *after* the programme had been agreed), which voted on a set of joint candidates, including comrades Wimborne-Idrissi and Lavalette. However, neither organisation's second candidate won: in the North East, Counterfire member Alex Snowdon, proposed by John Rees only on the morning of the meeting, lost out to Ian Spencer. The Platform's Mike Forster lost out to Chris Saltmarsh in Yorkshire, after Zarah Sultana backed the controversial former Kirklees councillor, Fazila Loonat,⁹ thereby splitting the vote. Loonat received three votes, Saltmarsh four and Mike Forster five. The proposal by the representative from the Socialist Unity Platform, Tina Becker, to do a run-off between Saltmarsh and Forster, was not supported by anybody else. These decisions certainly played a role too.

However, a key reason for their departure, we understand, was the presentation of a detailed 'logistics plan' in the middle of the stuffed January 4 meeting, which had the various posts on the 'campaign team' firmly sewn up: most of them members of the DSYP, plus James Giles as head of comms, and Zarah Sultana's husband Craig Lloyd and Max Shanly as joint 'campaign directors'. No doubt, all of these comrades have excellent skills and should be involved in the campaign. But, added to the problems above, this 'surprise' plan managed to alienate members of all the other groups not in the know.

There was no need to railroad the meeting in such a way. Most of the names in the plan would probably have been agreed to by the others

anyway. Counterfire's John Rees was clearly annoyed and said he would not be able to vote on this, but would have to consult his EC. It decided to withdraw a couple of days later. And, although the slightly bamboozled rep from the Platform for a Democratic Party voted in favour of the plan, the group then followed Counterfire out the door on December 10.

In slightly prickly negotiations with both, it was agreed that their two candidates would continue to be listed as 'endorsed' on the slate, but without standing on the programme and without them endorsing the other candidates. In return, both organisations agreed not to stand anybody against the slate and not to argue against it.

A rather unsatisfactory non-aggression pact. Now both candidates, if elected, will *not* be accountable to the rest of the GL slate and have no reason to adhere to its programme. It was a mistake to let them go. Mistakes do happen, of course - we are all human. The problem arises, however, when we try to cover them up - or, worse, attempt to rewrite history.

We are glad to see that the DSYP has since moved to 'rebalance' some of the secrecy and lack of accountability in the campaign in order to "embed transparency as a core operating principle" in future negotiations.

Jeremy Corbyn

It is worth looking at why Jeremy Corbyn is being 'endorsed' by the slate. It is not just the Corbyn clique that is complaining about this endorsement: there has been a fair amount of criticism from within the left about it too. The slate should distance itself from him, chiefly because he put Karie Murphy ("the Murphie") in charge. And isn't she implementing the opposite of the kind of programme that the slate is fighting for?

That is all certainly true. He is no doubt the main reason that Your Party is in such dire straits: the lack of any transparency and democracy, the rampant bureaucracy, the sham that was the launch conference, the withholding of membership data from the branches, the witch-hunt of the Socialist Workers Party and the rest of the left, etc. All this is not just Karie Murphy's doing - she is very much acting on behalf of and with the explicit agreement of Corbyn.

He proved that much at an

event in Bradford on January 10, where he announced that he would be campaigning to overturn the 'collective leadership' agreed at the launch conference in Liverpool, as well as enforce a ban on *any* dual membership:

I think we need to look at some of the structural issues. I think we need a leadership that is elected directly by its members and accountable to its members: that's a change we can make later on. And I think we need to have the loyalty of members directly to Your Party in the future. These are issues that can come within debate in the party. Let us get together to get our party back on track.¹⁰

He is referring, of course, to having a single, directly elected leader (like, oh, maybe himself?). Such a Bonapartist leader would be utterly unaccountable to the rest of the leadership, let alone to the atomised membership. A travesty, which was - quite rightly, if narrowly - rejected at conference (by an online vote by the members).

Of course, he should have the right to campaign for conference to change the constitution on this question - or any other, for that matter. Wouldn't it be nice if we all had that right - instead of the charade we saw at the launch conference, where members were only allowed to 'vote' on a few measly 'options' presented by HQ? It is, however, very noteworthy that, despite the very best efforts of HQ to minimise democracy to a bare minimum, members still managed to vote for collective leadership and against a witch-hunt. The fact that Corbyn wants to roll back both these gains is indeed worrying, though not exactly surprising. What is new is that he started to come out *publicly* on such issues. Good. We are starting to see an open clash of ideas.

The Grassroots Left endorsement of Corbyn does not mean that it supports him politically. That much is clear from the political platform of the campaign. But he remains (for now) a central figure in Your Party, which would not have come into existence without him (leaving aside the sorry state of said 'existence'). But he is not just the party's biggest asset - he is also its biggest problem. The more he exposes his anti-democratic leanings, the more the shine will come off the

man and the less important he will become. By featuring him on the slate, the GL acknowledges a certain reality - and also underlines that, apart from Corbyn himself, none of the careerist acolytes promoted by HQ should be on the leadership.

Candidate trouble

We are hearing, incidentally, that Murphy is having great trouble finding decent candidates to stand on the prospective 'Corbyn slate' - which is not surprising, really, considering how much HQ has alienated members and branches up and down the country. Even a couple of candidates now standing on the GL slate were approached. We hear that Murphy even had to ask the infamous 'Kika from Cambridge' if she would be up for it. In the tame YP Connections Network (which now consists of reps from almost 80 YP branches), Kika Pye became well known for her consistent anti-left sectarian rantings and anti-democratic manoeuvres. An excuse to expel her was finally found, when it transpired that she was actually never elected to be the rep, despite claiming otherwise. There is no chance she would be elected either, we hear - most active YP members in Cambridge loathe her.

However, because voting will be done online by an atomised membership, people like her - if backed by Corbyn - have a chance to get on the CEC. We will do our best to expose the likes of her.

So, despite the clear efforts of Murphy to create a Corbyn slate,¹¹ we will not be surprised if there actually is not a full one. He might just end up 'endorsing' this or that independent candidate - and there are certainly a lot of them throwing their hats into the ring: another reason why the Grassroots Left should have openly reported about its efforts. Now every Tom, Dick and Harry has convinced themselves that their name must absolutely be on the ballot paper. Some candidacies will be more serious than others. Crispin Flintoff, for example, will make things hard for the DSYP's Max Shanly in the South East. Ditto Liverpool councillor Sam Gorst, who is standing as an independent in the North West, after having first been asked to go onto the Corbyn slate, before being ceremoniously dumped in favour of Mohammed Azam in Manchester.

Corbyn's side has great advantages though. Besides the Corbyn persona, of course. HQ controls not just the money, but also the membership data. This puts the left at a distinct disadvantage. It cannot hope to equal any snazzy campaign that Corbyn's side will be able to finance and spread far and wide. Our only hope is to be as open and democratic as possible, in a transparently-run campaign: for example, by honestly reporting, by getting branch endorsements, by running open hustings, by facilitating real political debate ●

Notes

1. www.grassrootsleft.org.
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ZIONISM

Drawing a clear red line

Zionism is an inverted form of racism. Pro-Zionists should not be in an explicitly anti-Zionist organisation. **Jack Conrad** urged the Socialist Unity Platform to stand by its agreed principles

Recently, at the January 10 meeting, Matt Cooper pulled out of the Socialist Unity Platform on behalf of the Alliance for Workers' Liberty. Good. The SUP is an organisation uniting comrades on the basis of anti-capitalist, anti-racist, anti-imperialist principles - not least, we want Your Party to be "explicitly and uncompromisingly anti-Zionist".¹ And here's the rub. The AWL is notoriously a pro-Zionist, social-imperialist organisation.

In no small part, the AWL believes that socialism will be achieved by supporting what is "progressive" in imperialism. So, after the forces of George W Bush and Tony Blair predictably routed Saddam Hussein's Ba'athist state, AWL leaders declared that the "right side had won". The big idea being that the United States was acting as the "globocop" and would reorder the entire Middle East and, albeit inadvertently, bring about a situation where trade unions and workers' organisations could flourish as never before.²

Antecedents

True, the AWL opposes, criticises and even condemns certain features of imperialism, but not imperialism *per se*. An approach with long antecedents. Eduard Bernstein, for example, thought that capitalist social relations had to be spread across the world as a precondition for socialism. Towards that end, he refused to oppose colonial projects by peoples of a "higher culture", as long as they treated the native peoples well. His revisionist wing of the Social Democratic Party in Germany called this "civilising mission" a "positive colonial policy". In reality it amounted to underwriting the German empire's brutal conquest of South West Africa, which, far from paternalistically bringing enlightenment to the indigenous population, proceeded to ruthlessly oppress, exploit and kill them. Bernstein, needless to say, was morally affronted by the Herero and Namaqua genocide of 1904-08.

Bernstein and his co-thinkers were forthrightly opposed by the likes of Karl Kautsky, Rosa Luxemburg, August Bebel, Wilhelm Liebknecht, Vladimir Lenin and Ernest Balfour Bax. Quite rightly. During the Second International's colonial policy debates, Bernstein wrote this:

Races who are hostile to or incapable of civilisation cannot claim our sympathy... We will condemn and oppose certain methods of subjugating savages. But we will not condemn the idea that savages must be subjugated and made to conform to the rules of higher civilisation.³

Those who know the AWL will recognise that, while the language has changed (sanitised, to suit modern sensibilities), the narrative is exactly the same. Here, for example, is the AWL's Clive Bradley: "The 'resistance' to US/UK occupation [of Iraq] is reactionary. As things stand, the occupation cannot accurately be called 'colonial'. The conflict is more one between the ['civilised' - JC] globocop of the empire of capital and local mafias and gangs." Understandably then, unlike the vast bulk of the left, the AWL refused to call for US and UK troops to withdraw. Apparently they protected the nascent Iraqi labour movement from the "savages". A laughable proposition.

When it came to Syria, another



According to the AWL, this is probably yet another example of anti-Semitism

senior AWLer, Mark Osborn, wrote: "If the US destroys the bases used by Syria's military to massacre its own citizens, you will not find the AWL on the streets protesting. The main enemy is Assad, not America."⁴ And on Libya, AWLer Sacha Ismail wailed: "... nothing was going to save the Libyan revolution except outside intervention."⁵ He was just repeating the words of his master, Sean Matgamna, the AWL's patriarch, who had already written his 'Why we should not denounce intervention in Libya', where he claimed that Nato would "likely ... produce desirable results".⁶

There were, too, the staggeringly stupid. Martyn Hudson took the biscuit. He declared that the "protyrant left" downplayed and branded the Benghazi uprising as reactionary, when "it is clear that the rebels form a genuine citizens' army", whose aim is to create "an open civil society" with a "multi-party government". He concluded by comparing Libya's Transitional National Council to the Petrograd Soviet in 1919 - "free Libya fights for its very existence".⁷ Please!

We heard the same sort of crap and nonsense, when it came to Northern Ireland, Yugoslavia, Afghanistan and, of course, Ukraine. Despite splitting from the Ukraine Solidarity Campaign over its active promotion of far-right Azov politics, the AWL is still to be counted in the 'Arm, arm, arm Ukraine' camp, alongside Paul Mason, Chris Ford, John McDonnell ... and mainstream bourgeois liberal opinion.

The words used to justify imperialist conquests, interventions and proxies are always noble. Who but a hopeless dogmatist could oppose spreading civilisation to the 'lower races'? Who could oppose bringing democracy to those crushed under the iron heel of dictatorship? Who could oppose the only force capable

of preventing mass slaughter? Who could not but side with those resisting a revanchist foreign invasion? But it amounts to the same thing: social-imperialism.

However, it is over Israel that the AWL particularly distinguishes itself. With some considerable justification, it can claim to have been amongst the first to use 'left anti-Semitism' as a weapon to smear or silence critics of Israel and Zionism. The warped logic goes like this: 'Almost all Jews are Zionists and almost all Zionists are Jews. Therefore to be anti-Zionist is anti-Semitic'.⁸ What are diametrically opposed political viewpoints - ie, Zionism and anti-Zionism - are thereby transmogrified into racial categories. Exactly the same logic could be applied to pre-June 1991 South Africa: 'Almost all white South Africans support apartheid and almost all supporters of apartheid are white South Africans. Therefore to oppose apartheid is racist.'

Ammunition

Inevitably then, in the name of upholding Israel's "right to exist and the right to defend itself", the AWL opposes the BDS campaign, denies the right of Palestinian refugees to return to their historic homeland and supported the Labour NEC in "adopting the IHRA" so-called definition of anti-Semitism.⁹ Effectively the AWL egged on the witch-hunt in the Labour Party and provided ammunition wherever it could. Eg, Labour Against the Witchhunt's agreed aims sum "up the core elements of left anti-Semitism".¹⁰ Why? Because LAW defended those anti-Zionists who were falsely accused by the Labour Party bureaucracy of being anti-Semites: eg, Ken Livingstone, Moshé Machover, Tony Greenstein, Jackie Walker, Stan Keable, Marc Wadsworth and hundreds of others besides.

Anyway, the question remains, how and why did Mr Cooper attend Socialist Unity Platform meetings? It ought to have been a problem for the AWL - it certainly ought to have been a problem for the SUP. Hence this CPGB motion:

1. Rightly amongst the founding principles of the Socialist Unity Platform has been a clear commitment to oppose Zionism. We are proudly anti-Zionist.
2. Zionism is a racist ideology with origins in a misguided reaction to the blood-and-soil nationalism of late 19th century European reaction. Zionism agreed with the proposition that European Jews were foreigners in their own land. Zionism wanted a Jewish settler-colony in Palestine. In the state form of Israel, Zionism predictably established an apartheid state with a political economy that seeks to exclude the indigenous Palestinian population. In practice that means ethnic cleaning and ultimately genocide.
3. The Alliance for Workers' Liberty is a pro-imperialist, pro-Zionist organisation. In terms of providing ideas, it was in the forefront of the 'anti-Zionism equals anti-Semitism' witch-hunt in the Labour Party.
4. Though the AWL is not officially listed as an affiliate, one of its members has been attending SUP meetings.
5. This needs to end forthwith.
6. The SUP hereby withdraws any invitation to attend and completely disassociates itself from the AWL.

We did not get to debate the motion, let alone vote on it. There was a vote on whether to debate it: that easily won. However, Mr Cooper chose the coward's way out. He refused to debate. He obviously feared

humiliation. So, after I declined to withdraw the motion, he ran.

It should be noted that the Spartacist League's Eibhlín McColgan, in absentia, urged that political differences with the AWL "should be addressed through political debate, not through exclusion or other organisational measures".¹¹ A thoroughly liberal 'live-and-let-live' formulation utterly alien to our approach. We recognise the necessity of drawing sharp lines of demarcation: eg, in LAW we successfully excluded genuine anti-Semites. Without making clear what is acceptable and what is unacceptable we have nothing more than a politically useless melange.

What goes for a political platform actually goes for almost any and every voluntary organisation imaginable. Football clubs, chat forums, tenants' associations, religious cults, producer cooperatives, debating societies, campaign groups - all have their written (and unwritten) rules and regulations which distinguish between insiders and outsiders. Certainly, an "explicitly and uncompromisingly anti-Zionist" organisation that includes pro-Zionists has no future. Either anti-Zionism matters or it matters not ... so, in the absence of an SUP debate, let us present our case, not only against Zionism and its apologists, but for a revolutionary solution in Israel-Palestine.¹²

Colonialism

Zionism is inverted anti-Semitism. It too considers Jews a race - a race of outsiders, who, as such, would always face persecution from those they live amongst. Hence the disdain for assimilation and the dogma of eternal anti-Semitism. Instead of demanding equality and fighting anti-Semitism, it should be accepted as a fact of nature, a norm, a perfectly understandable reaction to the presence of Jewish "strangers".¹³ Only when the Jews 'return to Zion' will they become a 'normal people'.

Naturally, nowadays, Zionism claims to be the "national liberation movement of the Jewish people".¹⁴ However, in its origins Zionism was perfectly candid. The aim was a Jewish state for the Jewish people - something which, of course, could only be obtained through colonialism and displacing the indigenous population.

Migration to Palestine began in the 1890s as a trickle and rapidly increased in the 1930s. Zionism finally achieved state form in May 1948. Between 750,000 and a million Palestinians were expelled. The first Nakba. In 1967 Israel defeated the neighbouring Arab states and established military control over the Golan Heights, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Half a million Palestinians were driven out. The second Nakba.

Today Israel is still bent on territorial expansion: Lebanon, Syria, the West Bank and Gaza. In Lebanon and Syria the pattern follows the classic 'defensive imperialism' of 'buffer zones'. In the case of southern Syria, the new 'buffer zone' is there to defend the Golan Heights 'buffer zone' (annexed in 1981).

However, when it comes to the West Bank and Gaza, the main drive is ideological, not military. Zionism, as an ongoing settler-colonial project, is at the very least committed to incorporating the whole of Mandate Palestine. On the West Bank, Israel has already planted well over 500,000 settlers. Some 40,000 Palestinians have been displaced and over 1,000

killed since October 7 2023 alone. Meanwhile, despite the US-brokered ceasefire, Gaza stands on the threshold of Zionism’s ‘final solution’ - ethnic cleansing or genocide. A third Nakba.

Bizarrely, left panglossians doggedly maintained that Israel “cannot win” in Gaza, that Israel is “unequivocally losing”, or that the Israel has already “lost in Gaza”.¹⁵ All true ... if Israel’s war aim was really about totally “crushing” Hamas.¹⁶ That was, though, never Benjamin Netanyahu’s intention. Its social roots are deep ... and enduring.

No, the *real* aim of Netanyahu and his war cabinet was to destroy the infrastructure of Gaza, impose famine and uproot enough people in order to take yet another step towards the goal of realising Greater Israel. The evidence is overwhelming.

Zionism maintains that Jews have a right to the whole of the land of Mandate Palestine (either because of the approval of the Balfour declaration by the League of Nations in July 1922 or Yahweh’s promise to Abraham in Genesis). True, there are profound differences over the constitutional set-up in this Greater Israel. Liberal (or General) Zionism says it is committed to market capitalism, secularism, democratic values and the rule of law (which can, of course, see unelected judges overrule Knesset votes).

However, there are those - ie, the religious Zionists - who envisage a Greater Israel as a Jewish theocracy. Fringe elements even want Jerusalem’s al-Aqsa mosque demolished and replaced by a Third Temple - the prelude for the second coming of Jesus, for messianic Christians. While secular Jews are viewed as heretics, there is a call for non-Jews, the Children of Noah (*Bnei Noach*), to observe god’s laws and support his chosen people - perhaps a future source of urgently needed new settlers.¹⁷

Some religious Zionists even hanker after a *greater* Greater Israel - based on various biblical passages: Genesis, Numbers, Ezekiel. At its largest extent their Eretz Israel stretches from the Nile to the Euphrates.¹⁸ Of course, any such Israel would come with a poisoned chalice: an oppressed Arab *supermajority*. The Zionist conquistadors would have to permanently deny them elementary rights. The newly acquired Arab population would be far too big to do much else with. Mass expulsion is simply not feasible.

Organised racism

Working class politics in Israel - that is, Israeli-Jewish working class politics - barely exists now as an effective collectivity. Historically there has been a remorseless shift from voting for the Labor Party to parties of the right and far right, in an attempt to preserve sectional privileges - the Jewish-Israeli working class being a labour aristocracy that has seen its social power substantially eroded by years of neoliberalism.¹⁹ In 1983 membership of the trade union federation, Histadrut, stood at 1.6 million: today it is around 570,000. Histadrut, note, once the spearhead of Zionist colonisation, has also been shorn of its role in health, banking and being a very substantial employer in its own right.

Histadrut needs to be put into the context of colonisation. Marxists distinguish between various forms of colonies: plantation colonies, exploitation colonies, colonies properly so-called, etc. Broadly the colonisation of the India, Congo and South Africa type saw the colonisers live off the backs of the native workforce, including peasant farmers, through all manner of dodges and barely concealed forms of robbery. That went hand-in-hand with staffing an army, running a bureaucracy, managing railways, docks, etc. The

colonisers therefore constituted a relatively narrow caste, who often maintained close ties with the imperial homeland (to which the most successful returned, having made their fortunes).

Israel is what Karl Kautsky classified as a “work colony”,²⁰ or what Moshé Machover prefers to call an “exclusion colony”²¹ (other examples being the USA, Canada and Australia). Instead of constituting themselves a narrow, often highly privileged, caste and exploiting native labour, the colonisers make up the full spectrum of classes: bourgeoisie, petty bourgeoisie, small farmers, workers, unemployed workers, etc. The indigenous population become foreigners in their own land and are either marginalised or driven to the point of extinction - typically justified using an *organising* form of racism.

Hence, whatever the socialistic pretensions of Nahman Syrkin and Ber Borochov, from its inception Zionism simply adopted the *Blut und Boden* (blood and soil) racism of late 19th century European reaction. Lenni Brenner makes the point:

Enthusiasm for *Blut und Boden* were part of Zionism before the first modern Zionist ever left Europe. Race Zionism was a curious offshoot of racial anti-Semitism. True, these Zionists argued, the Jews were a pure race - certainly purer than, say, the Germans, who, as even the pan-Germanics conceded, had a huge admixture of Slavic blood. But to these Zionists even their racial purity could not overcome the one flaw in Jewish existence: they did not have their own Jewish *Boden*.²²

For understandable ideological reasons, Zionism latched onto Palestine (the biblical Jewish homeland). But what marked the Zionists out, when they went there, was not that, to begin with, they were a minority of the population in Ottoman and then Mandate Palestine. No, unlike ‘normal’ colonists, they exercised “no coercive power over the indigenous population”.²³

That began to change with the formation of the Haganah militia, but it was poorly armed and could only manage defensive operations till the 1940s. So gaining the backing of an imperial sponsor was absolutely fundamental. To begin with, this was Britain. It was a *quid pro quo*: Britain agreed the Balfour declaration in November 1917 in the expectation of “forming for England ‘a little loyal Jewish Ulster’ in a sea of potentially hostile Arabism”.²⁴ The Ottoman empire was about to be carved up by Anglo-French imperialism and that necessitated finding, or creating, willing collaborators: France promoted the historically established Maronite Christians in Mandate Lebanon; the British turned to the incoming Zionist Jews in Mandate Palestine.

Histadrut played a determining role in what was to become the political economy of Israel. It organised Jewish workers and forced the Jewish capitalist class to grant all manner of concessions - not least barring indigenous, cheaper, Arab labour from whole sectors of the economy (relaxed somewhat after statehood). Histadrut also provided Labor Zionism with the money, the votes and the organisation needed to make it the dominant force politically from the mid-1930s till the late 1970s. So it was far removed from being a trade union federation of the type normally seen in the so-called west.

Zionist friends

Obediently reflecting British imperial interests, mainstream Labourism has traditionally maintained a sympathetic attitude towards Zionism. Poale Zion - now the Jewish Labour Movement -

affiliated to the Labour Party in 1920. Successive Labour conferences voted in favour of establishing a Jewish state in Palestine. Labour considered the Israeli Labor Party a fraternal organisation and maintained close contacts. From the early 1960s the TUC was giving Histadrut financial aid for its Afro-Asian Institute - a wonderful means for Israel to spread its diplomatic influence. Trade union tops regularly spoke out against Arab feudalism, Arab backwardness and Nazi-tainted Arab politics.

Nye Bevan, Edward Short, Jennie Lee, Michael Foot and Jeremy Corbyn’s “inspiration”, Tony Benn, were also counted amongst the Labour Friends of Israel.²⁵ The lot of them routinely cited the kibbutz as a brave socialist experiment. Eric Heffer even defended Israel’s continued occupation of the West Bank and Gaza after 1967 on the grounds that Israel was “the only genuine democratic and socialist-oriented state in the Middle East”.²⁶

Next to nothing of that left now remains. Today Israel counts amongst those countries dominated by the hard right and is therefore regarded as an abomination by those who consider themselves as being the least bit progressive. True, there is still a pro-Zionist ‘left’. But it is, thankfully, marginal and widely despised, the AWL being the most notable example nowadays. Not that we should forget the Communist Party of Britain’s resident Zionist, Mary Davis, and her grotesque ‘Anti-Semitism awareness courses’ (as if the CPB has an anti-Semitism problem, when, in actual fact, it has a pro-Zionism problem).²⁷

Essentially their two-state ‘solution’ echoes the Palestine Liberation Organisation, Fatah, Hadash ‘official communism’, the Israeli Labor Party and the international liberal consensus. It amounts to economic Zionism. A little Israel - an Israel returned to pre-1967 borders - is expected to live peacefully alongside a West Bank-Gaza Strip Palestine. Except, of course, it won’t. Even a Bantustan is unacceptable for Israel: “There will not be a Palestinian state. It’s very simple: it will not be established,” Netanyahu emphatically insists.²⁸

For appearance’s sake - before, that is, Donald Trump tore up the pretence of international law - US administrations promoted the touching picture of the wolf lying down with the lamb. But, out of a naked self-interest in dominating the Middle East, the US has backed Israeli aggression to the hilt. For all the crocodile tears, the same goes for its Nato allies, such as the UK, Germany and Italy ... because of their subordination to the US hegemon. So there will be no repetition of 1991, when apartheid was smoothly negotiated away in a US-sponsored deal, which gave black citizens the vote in return for the African National Congress leaving capitalist big business intact.

In Israel-Palestine there is no overwhelming oppressed national majority. No threat, therefore, of a successful revolutionary explosion. The odds are completely stacked in Israel’s favour. Hence, while Hamas resorts to desperate suicide missions and martyrdom, the Palestinian Authority is reduced to impotent verbal gestures, pathetic diplomatic pleading and effective collaboration with the Israeli occupiers. Recognising this, the likes of the AWL and the CPB clutch at *anti-democratic* liberal Zionist protests within Israel - that and common economic struggles, which are supposed to weld together Hebrew and Arab workers into a lever for social change.

In fact, Zionism acts to keep workers inside Israel structurally divided. That means legal, political and material privileges for Israeli-Jewish workers - privileges they will hang on to for dear life ... unless there

is something much better on offer (Israeli-Jewish workers, especially those at the bottom end of the labour market, have no wish to compete with Arab-Israeli/Palestinian worst-paid labour as *equals*, that is for sure).

As a justification for the so-called two-state solution, we are assured that an Israel-Palestine rapprochement would provide the solid, democratic foundations, from where alone the struggle for socialism can begin. In other words, their approach is based on a combination of naive wishful thinking and mechanical, stagist reasoning. Note, trade union politics - ie, struggles over wages and conditions - always finds itself cut short by the high politics of war, security, national privilege, etc. There have been no Histadrut strikes demanding equal civil rights for Israeli-Palestinians, the decolonisation of the West Bank or an end to the Gaza genocide. Nor should any such development be expected within the narrow confines of today’s circumstances.

Arab nation

No democratic solution for the Israel-Palestine conflict can be achieved in isolation. Objective circumstances simply do not permit any such outcome. That is as certain as anything can be in this uncertain world.

By themselves the Palestinians - debilitatingly split between Hamas and Fatah - palpably lack the ability to achieve anything beyond hopeless resistance or abject surrender. There is, however, a way to cut through the Gordian knot: widen the strategic front. There are nearly 300 million Arabs inhabiting a contiguous territory that stretches from the Atlantic Ocean, across north Africa, down the Nile to north Sudan, and all the way to the Persian Gulf and up to the Caspian Sea.

Though studded here and there with national minorities - Kurds, Assyrians, Turks, Armenians, Berbers, etc - there is a definite Arab or Arabised community. Despite being separated into 25 different states and divided by religion and religious sect - Sunni, Shi’ite, Alaouite, Ismaili, Druze, Orthodox Christian, Catholic Christian, Maronite, Nestorian, etc - they share a living bond of pan-Arab consciousness, born not only of a common language, but of a closely related history. Arabs are binational. There are Moroccans, Yemenis, Egyptians, Jordanians, etc. But there is also a wider Arab identity, which has its origins going back to the Muslim conquests of the 7th and 8th centuries.

Communists are, therefore, surely, obliged to take the lead in the fight for pan-Arab unity - as Marx and Engels and their comrades in the Communist League did in the fight for German unity. Such a fight, is, of course, inseparable from the task of building a mass Communist Party - first in this or that Arab country, then throughout the Arab world. A Communist Party of Arabia (a section of a reformed Communist International).

What of the “just and lasting settlement” between Hebrews and Palestinians that Jeremy Corbyn ineffectually harps on about?²⁹ That can only happen in the context of sweeping away Iran’s theocracy, the Hashemite kingdom of Jordan, Lebanon’s sectarian plutocracy, Egypt’s military-bureaucratic regime, the House of Saud, the petty Gulf sheikdoms - and the establishment of a Socialist Republic of Arabia. Israel could be offered federal status, with the confident expectation that such an invitation would receive a positive response from below.³⁰

Hence, the road to a united working class in Palestine passes through Amman, it passes through Tehran, it passes through Beirut, it passes through Cairo and it passes through Riyadh.³¹ ●

Notes

- docs.google.com/document/d/1C7J-x4TN3uDTU4ILwpDRLpZ7D4KAf6ZfVMewkB0935s/edit.
- For the fullest presentation of the argument, see *Workers’ Liberty* Nos 2-3, December 2002 - in particular the articles by Martin Thomas and Colin Foste.
- Neue Zeit* October 14 1896, quoted by P Smith in ‘Those who side with imperialism’ *Weekly Worker* October 23 2014 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1031/those-who-side-with-imperialism).
- Solidarity* June 13 2012.
- www.workersliberty.org/story/2011/09/07/libyan-revolution-issues-marxists.
- Solidarity* March 23 2011.
- Solidarity* May 4 2011.
- The argument of leading AWLer Mark Osborn, testifying before an employment tribunal in November 2012. Further-education lecturer and founding director of the Academic Friends of Israel, Ronnie Fraser, had brought an action against the University and College Union, claiming that its policy of supporting the BDS campaign, as agreed at its annual conference, was “anti-Semitic” and therefore constituted “harassment” of himself as a Jewish member. Osborn testified *on behalf* of Fraser *against* the union. His case was dismissed - see www.scribd.com/document/235400428/Mark-Osborn-Cross-Examination. Unusually the UCU claimed its £600,000 costs. There was a final out-of-court settlement in January 2015 - see *Times Higher Education* January 22 2015.
- K Road ‘Anti-IHRA lobby is defence of left antisemitism’ August 28 2018 - www.workersliberty.org/story/2018-08-29/anti-ihra-lobby-defence-left-antisemitism.
- D Street ‘No way to fight the witch hunt’ *Solidarity* January 16 2019.
- Email, January 10 2026.
- What follows is a shortened, but suitably edited, version of my article, ‘Say it loud, say it proud’ *Weekly Worker* September 4 2025 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1551/say-it-loud-say-it-proud).
- T Hertzl *The Jewish state* (1896): www.almdendron.com/blog/wp-content/images/2016/11/The-Jewish-State.pdf.
- nationbuilder.com/webelieveinisrael/pages/5169/attachments/original/1746803990/WBIIStopTheHateUk Booklet.
- In order: Sophie Squire ‘Six months of slaughter, six months of resistance’ *Socialist Worker* April 3 2024; Ofer Cassif of the ‘official communist’ Hadash party in Israel; and US ‘realist’ John Mearsheimer *Al Jazeera* January 24 2025.
- Note, the AWL’s Martin Thomas calls for exactly that, but, citing the best interests of Israel, does not think Benjamin Netanyahu’s war cabinet is going about it in an effective manner: “We want Hamas crushed (but Israel’s onslaught won’t do that, and it is doing vast harm to the civilian population of Gaza). We don’t want Israel crushed” (M Thomas, January 9 2024 - www.workersliberty.org/story/2024-01-09/letter-reply-critics).
- See R Feldman *Messianic Zionism in the digital age: Jews, Noahides and the Third Temple imaginary* New Brunswick NJ 2024.
- “On that day the Lord made a covenant with Abram, saying, ‘To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the Euphrates, the land of the Kenites, Kenizzites, Kadmonites, the Kadamites, the Hittites, Perizzites, Rephaites, Amorites, Canaanites, Girgashites and the Jebusites’” (*Genesis* xv, 18-1).
- The thesis of the Jewish Israeli working class being a labour aristocracy is closely associated with Maxime Rodinson. See his *Israel: a colonial settler state?* New York NY 1973.
- See M Macnair (intro) *Karl Kautsky: on colonialism* London 2013.
- M Machover ‘Colonialism and the natives’ *Weekly Worker* December 17 2015: weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1087/colonialism-and-the-natives.
- L Brenner *Zionism in the age of dictators: a reappraisal* London 2004, p31.
- M Shalev *The labour movement in Israel: ideology and political economy* Westview CO 1996, p1.
- R Storrs *Orientations* London 1937, p405. Sir Ronald Storrs served as British military governor of Jerusalem in 1917.
- www.facebook.com/JeremyCorbynMP/posts/tony-benn-would-have-turned-100-todaya-rare-courageous-and-continuous-voice-for-/1222968332528032.
- E Heffer ‘Why Labour should support Israel’ *Labour looks at Israel: 1967-1971* London 1971, p31.
- See T Greenstein ‘Distracting from genocide’ *Weekly Worker* May 2 2024: weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1489/distracting-from-genocide.
- The Times of Israel January 13 2026.
- hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2017-07-05/debates/7F795C5C-3E77-479E-949D-22EA6599F419/IsraelAndPalestinianTalks.
- A perspective advanced by Jabra Nicola and Moshé Machover in June 1969. See M Machover *Israelis and Palestinians: conflict and resolution* Chicago IL 2012, pp15-25.
- To paraphrase George Habash, first PFLP general secretary, and before him Ahmad Shukeiri, first PLO chair (see JT Buck *The decline of the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine* Hampshire College MA, 2013, p4).

YOUR PARTY

Secrets, spin and smears

Factional differences are being fought out using the state machine, unattributable media briefings and bureaucratic information control. **Mike Macnair** investigates the latest attack on Zarah Sultana and her associates

Someone high up in Your Party, as yet unidentified, gave an unattributable briefing to the *New Statesman*, which, as presumably calculated, has caused something of a storm. The smoking gun is the Information Commissioner's Office and its letter replying to the Peace and Justice Project. That reply, the full contents of which remain undisclosed, dealt with Zarah Sultana's September 2025 attempted membership launch and the Jeremy Corbyn-controlled PJP's referral about a possible breach of data protection regulations.

The published *New Statesman* story is that Zarah Sultana and her associates may be guilty of "serious criminal activity". A charge that could have come from the ICO reply, or the briefing, or the *New Statesman* itself. The *Guardian* repeated the story in the same or stronger terms. Inacio Vieira on *Substack* adds merely criticism of the report as overstated and his unsuccessful attempt to get the ICO to give a clear answer about what it had said.¹

The ICO letter is not a secret to be 'leaked'. The PJP's referral was publicly announced, and there is no obvious reason why the ICO's reply should be confidential or subject to litigation or legal advice privilege. What is at issue is the *briefing* - whether it was misleading and whether it would appear to be misleading if the ICO's reply was disclosed in its full form.

The point of the briefing was presumably to smear Zarah Sultana and her associates in advance of the coming elections to Your Party's central executive committee. But, if so, it seems inept, since it is just as likely to work as a smear on the originator of the briefing, as somebody who uses unattributable briefings to promote a particular line, or as a smear on Your Party as a whole, as characterised by apolitical clique warfare among its leaders.

Fraud

Unfortunately, we cannot avoid speculating about what the ICO may have meant by its letter, because the essence of the *New Statesman* and *Guardian* reports is the claim that the ICO has said that Sultana and her associates may be guilty of something more serious than some technical contravention of the European Union's General Data Protection Regulation 2016 (GDPR). Inacio Vieira argues that there was probably merely a standard clause in the letter - as it were, 'We aren't taking this up, but if you think there is a case you can try "Report Fraud" (renamed from "Action Fraud", which has been nicknamed "Inaction Fraud")'.²

However, the *New Statesman* version claims that in the ICO letter is this: "A police investigation would take primacy over an ICO investigation, the advice added." This is a slightly different point. What might be being said is that if the allegations (whatever they were) the PJP made to the ICO were true, this would amount to a serious crime, with the result that a police investigation should happen *before* the ICO dealt with the alleged infraction of the GDPR.

This is analogous to rape cases in universities and other private disciplinary procedures: the effect of doing the internal disciplinary procedure first is to preclude there being a successful prosecution, since the evidence which could be used in the prosecution becomes 'contaminated' by being processed through the



Media smears: a form of factional war

quasi-judicial internal disciplinary procedure.³ So, similarly, a fraud prosecution would be prejudiced by the ICO making findings about the authority, or lack of authority, of the attempted membership launch.

But how plausible is this interpretation? The *Guardian* claims that the ICO "advised the PJP to consider going to Action Fraud... and the police to determine whether the issue constituted criminal activity". The alleged crime would, then, have to be one of the offences under the Fraud Act 2006: probably either fraud by false representation under section 2⁴ or fraud by abuse of position under section 3.⁵

But both offences require that the defendant has acted dishonestly and with a view to making a gain or causing a loss. Thus, for example, in section 2:

- (1) A person is in breach of this section if he:
- (a) dishonestly makes a false representation, and
 - (b) intends, by making the representation,
 - (i) to make a gain for himself or another; or
 - (ii) to cause loss to another or to expose another to a risk of loss.

Section 4 contains analogous words. By section 5 (2) (a) "Gain" and "loss" "extend only to gain or loss in money or other property"; this is presumably in the statute in order to exclude dishonest representations by politicians and journalists with a view to obtaining votes.

The likelihood of a successful prosecution of Sultana or her associates under the Fraud Act is thus minimal. A prosecutor would be in the highest degree unlikely to be able to show either dishonesty or a view to making a gain or causing a loss on the basis of the aborted membership

launch of September 2025.

Nevertheless there might, in principle, be *civil* claims available. Eg, for defamation, on Sultana's side, but she has said she will not pursue this⁶ - sensibly, given the extreme extent to which the specialist bar in defamation sells and denies justice. Or in contract, on the basis that there may have been some legally binding agreements involved - though *what* if anything was agreed is very obscure.

GDPR

We do not know what the PJP said in its referral to the ICO. There are a number of possibilities posed by the labyrinthine bureaucratic structure created by the GDPR and the 2018 act giving it legal effect in the UK after Brexit. The simplest, however, is that the PJP reported the aborted membership portal launch as a "personal data breach", as an "unauthorised disclosure" or "unauthorised... access" under GDPR article 4 (12): "... 'personal data breach' means a breach of security leading to the accidental or unlawful destruction, loss, alteration, unauthorised disclosure of, or access to, personal data transmitted, stored or otherwise processed".⁷

This would require the claim to be made that Sultana and her associates in the launch were "third parties" under article 4 (10) - "a natural or legal person, public authority, agency or body other than the data subject, controller, processor and persons who, under the direct authority of the controller or processor, are authorised to process personal data".

Alternatively, the objection could be of unauthorised processing, contrary to GDPR article 29: "Article 29. Processing under the authority of the controller or processor: The processor and any person acting under the authority of the controller or of the processor, who has access to

personal data, shall not process those data except on instructions from the controller, unless required to do so by [domestic law]."⁸

For this purpose, we would have to take it that the claim was that "the controller" was the PJP and "the processor" Sultana and her associates, so that Sultana and her associates, having access to personal data, processed that data without instructions from the PJP, thus violating article 29.

As soon as we attempt to approach the issue in this way, it becomes apparent that what was actually at stake in the September 2025 aborted membership portal launch was not what we would normally call a "data breach" (hackers get in; data is accidentally sent to the wrong recipient; and so on). Rather, it is a dispute about what company lawyers call the "internal management" of the company⁹ - in this case, the internal management of the new party project, which became YP. But this at once takes us into the extreme obscurity of the agreements and authority relations in the 'new party project'; Carla Roberts has tracked some of the obscure history in this paper.¹⁰

This background would make it reasonable for the ICO to decline to go further with the reference, but to do so in a very neutral manner in order to avoid prejudicing any other possible claims. These would be, as I said above, civil contract claims, rather than criminal - though I have to say that the obscurity of the facts and the political context mean that both sides would be very ill-advised to pursue these.

Having said this, it is worth noting that I have not gone in depth into what I have described above as the labyrinthine bureaucratic structure created by the GDPR. This is a matter which is *itself* politically important. Critics have made the point that the GDPR produces a complex bureaucratic and box-ticking exercise, which discriminates in favour of 'Big Tech' and against smaller businesses by virtue of the resources required for compliance.¹¹

As soon as we see that the form of the GDPR discriminates in favour of Big Tech, and why, we can also see that this is a branch of the phenomenon I referred to in relation to defamation, that Charles III (and his recent ancestors) sold and denied justice, in violation of chapter 29 of Magna Carta, through the legal profession and the 'free market in legal services'. The construction of elaborate regulatory schemes, like the GDPR - but equally like the Companies Act 2006 with its 1,300 sections and 16 schedules - inherently discriminates in favour of concentrated wealth. Thus regulatory schemes of the GDPR type are *anti-democratic* and *promote the dictatorship of capital*.

It is a part of this that GDPR compliance is commonly (if often inaccurately) used as an excuse for non-transparency.¹² In this respect, the underlying *aim* of the GDPR - protecting privacy in information - is antagonistic to political democracy and socialism.

We can see this at work at two scales. The larger can be illustrated by reports that lots of renewable electricity supply operations - mainly wind farms - have been built which have to be paid to stay idle because the electricity grid has not been improved sufficiently for

them to be connected.¹³ This is both a market incentives failure and a simple planning failure. The market incentives failure is obvious. The planning failure reflects the fact that private information management (in this case, in the form of government spin) precludes rational decision-making. This irrationality is a symptom of the basic irrationality of *capitalism* in the 21st century.

The smaller scale can be seen in Your Party, where we began. It is perfectly clear that the effect of the central PJP people clinging to control through a combination of secrecy and unattributable briefings of the capitalist press has been to *demobilise* the possible energy and enthusiasm evoked by the initial announcement of a new party project. Political openness is the only way forward. ●

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Notes

1. *New Statesman*: www.newstatesman.com/politics/uk-politics/2026/01/your-party-advised-to-refer-unauthorised-membership-launch-to-police; *Guardian*: www.theguardian.com/politics/2026/jan/09/zarah-sultana-your-party-unauthorised-membership-portal-launch-may-have-been-serious-criminal-act. Vieira: inacioinvita.substack.com/p/new-statesmans-serious-criminal-activity.
2. publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm5803/cmselect/cmpubacc/40/report.html (March 31 2023).
3. See G Davies, 'Contamination of witness memory' in A Heaton-Armstrong, E Shepherd and D Wolchover (eds) *Analysing witness testimony* London 1999, chapter 2. Compare also www.barstandardsboard.org.uk/code-guidance/guidance-on-witness-preparation. See other references in M Macnair, 'Workers' movement: bureaucratic 'justice' and dealing with sex assault cases' *Weekly Worker* April 4 2013: weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/958/workers-movement-bureaucratic-justice-and-dealing-
4. The "false representation" being that the membership launch was authorised. This would depend on arguments about what the legal authority for actions in the name of the project was - not a straightforward matter. But, in view of the other requirements of the Fraud Act, the issue can be set to one side.
5. This section 4 claim would require positing that Sultana and/or her associates' access to the data about expressions of interest in what became Your Party would involve expecting them "to safeguard, or not to act against, the financial interests of another person" - the "other person" here being whoever was considered to have a proprietary interest in the data. This would at best be a complicated claim, but again, in view of the other requirements of the Fraud Act, can be set to one side.
6. 'Zarah Sultana vows reconciliation and cancels legal action after Your Party row' *The Independent* September 21 2025: www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/labour-reform-uk-greens-b2830904.html.
7. www.legislation.gov.uk/eur/2016/679/article/4.
8. www.legislation.gov.uk/eur/2016/679/article/29.
9. This is a very extensively debated topic in company law, but Wikipedia has a convenient summary: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Unintended_Kingdom_company_law, under the subheads "Constitutional separation of powers" and "Corporate litigation".
10. Eg, 'Corbyn's maybe party', September 19 2024 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1507/corbys-maybe-party); 'Dead-end politics', February 20 2025 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1526/dead-end-politics); 'Still waiting for Jeremy' July 10 2025 (weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/1546/still-waiting-for-jeremy). (More of the saga can be found linked at weeklyworker.co.uk/worker/authors/carla-roberts).
11. See, for example, MS Gal and O Aviv, 'The competitive effects of the GDPR' *Journal of Competition Law & Economics* Vol 16 (2020), cited in C Ducuing, 'Data protection without romance' *Utrecht Law Review* Vol 21 (2025); Y Smirnova and V Travieso-Morales at blogs.lse.ac.uk/businessreview/2025/08/01/why-is-gdpr-compliance-still-so-difficult (August 1 2025).
12. Eg, blog.frankleonhardt.com/2022/its-the-law-gdpr-as-an-excuse-and-workers-can-win-info/2024/gdpr-a-barrier-to-organising.
13. Eg, finance.yahoo.com/news/britain-pushed-ahead-green-power-130000238.html; and www.industrialinfo.com/news/article/uk-ditches-zombie-projects-to-free-up-power-grid-351483.

VENEZUELA

Their days were numbered

Deindustrialisation and reliance on commodity exports makes any independent economic policy impossible, argues **Michael Roberts**. Certainly the unpopularity of the Maduro regime was closely linked to the falling price of oil

Within hours of the US military strikes on Venezuela and the capture of its president, Nicolás Maduro, Donald Trump proclaimed that “very large United States oil companies would go in, spend billions of dollars, fix the badly broken infrastructure and start making money for the country”. Trump did not conceal the fact that a major reason for the attack and kidnapping of Maduro was putting the US in control of Venezuela’s vast oil reserves, described as “our oil” by Trump.

Venezuela holds the world’s largest oil reserves - about 303 billion barrels, or 17% of global reserves - surpassing OPEC+ leader Saudi Arabia, according to the London-based Energy Institute. But, despite its vast reserves, Venezuela’s crude output remains far below capacity. Production, which once peaked at 3.5 million barrels per day in the 1970s (over 7% of global output), fell below 2 million during the 2010s and averaged just 1.1 million last year.

The US itself is now the world’s biggest producer thanks to the so-called ‘shale revolution’ in the 2000s. But that has meant the world is increasingly awash in oil, as supply outstrips global demand growth, which is slowing due to crawling economic expansion in most major economies, and to the gradual switch to renewables for energy production. Indeed, at the time of the attack on Venezuela, the price of benchmark Brent crude was close to five-year lows at about \$60 a barrel.

Trump may be telling the global oil majors that he is running Venezuela now and they can pitch to invest and make ‘piles of money’, but the oil companies may be less sure of that. Former Chevron executive Ali Moshiri is making a pitch to raise \$2 billion to take over multiple Venezuelan assets. But this is a punt and the likes of Chevron itself, which already has a licence from the US to drill and produce Venezuelan oil, may not be so gung-ho.

The cost of restoring Venezuela’s oil production will not be cheap, as the industry has a dilapidated drilling infrastructure and the oil extracted is ‘extra-heavy’. Extracting this heavy oil requires drilling lots of relatively short-lived wells - a process quite similar to US shale oil production - then mixing the sludge with lighter oil or naphtha, so it can flow through pipelines before being exported and refined. Producing heavy oil requires advanced techniques, such as steam injection and blending with lighter crudes to make it marketable. Also, the country’s reserves are mostly concentrated in the Orinoco Belt - a vast, remote region in the eastern part of the country, stretching across roughly 55,000 square kilometres.

Moreover, the oil glut has already started to hit profits on further exploration and extraction. The US shale industry’s cumulative losses in the 2010s reached close to half a trillion dollars.¹ Everything depends on the ‘break-even price’, which has been estimated at an average of about \$60 per barrel for American shale.² All this is occurring against a backdrop of global oil supply growing faster than demand, with the International Energy Agency projecting global supply increases of 3 million barrels a day in 2025 and a further 2.4 million in 2026, against demand increases of only 830,000 barrels in 2025



Hugo Chávez: relied on high oil revenues

and 860,000 in 2026.³ Jorge León from Rystad Energy estimates that roughly doubling production to 2 million barrels by the early 2030s would cost \$115 billion - some three times ExxonMobil’s and Chevron’s combined capital expenditure last year. Could Exxon and Chevron make that profitable in the current world supply-and-demand balance for oil - especially as such heavy oil would need to be sold below the benchmark price?

However, there are other factors behind Trump’s move against Venezuela. The new National Security Strategy makes it clear: the Monroe doctrine of the 1820s is back on steroids.⁴ Back then, president James Monroe declared that European nations must not interfere or try to control Latin America, as this was now the ‘sphere of influence’ for the United States of America. Now under Trump, globalisation has given way to ‘Making America Great Again’ by firmly establishing Latin America as US imperialism’s backyard.

That means no country can be allowed to resist US policy and interests. ‘Friendly regimes’ must be installed to enable both privileged American use of resources and the ability to deny them to competitors. That means growing Chinese influence and investment in the region must be blocked - while Venezuelan oil made up just 300,000 of the 11.3 million barrels China imported each day in 2025, according to the Oxford Institute of Energy Studies,

companies from the People’s Republic had gained a foothold in Venezuela’s oil-drilling industry.

Back in 2024 at the time of the disputed re-election of Maduro, I pointed out that Venezuelan capitalism was tied closely to the profitability of the energy sector, which was in a death spiral after the collapse of oil prices after 2010 and US sanctions.⁵

The gains for the working class achieved under president Hugo Chávez in the 2000s were only possible because oil prices reached their zenith. But then commodity prices, including oil, dropped. That more or less coincided with Chávez’s death. The Maduro government lost the support of its working class base, as hyperinflation destroyed living standards. Maduro increasingly relied not on the support of the working class, but on the armed forces, which had special privileges. The military could buy in exclusive markets (for example, on military bases), had privileged access to loans and purchases of cars and apartments, and received substantial salary increases. They also exploited exchange controls and subsidies: for example, selling cheap gasoline purchased in neighbouring countries with huge profits.

The tragedy of Venezuela is that everything depended on the oil price; there was little or no development of the non-oil sectors, which anyway were in the hands of private companies. There was no independent national plan of investment controlled by the state. Given US sanctions on top of that

and the continual subversion of the government, the Chávez revolution’s days were numbered.

This is a lesson for all of Latin America. Deindustrialisation since the 1980s and increasing reliance on commodity exports subject all these economies to the volatile swings of commodity prices (agricultural, metals and oil). That makes it impossible for any independent economic policy, given the weakness of domestic capitalists and economies under the shadow of American imperialism ●

Michael Roberts blogs at
thenextrecession.wordpress.com

Notes

1. www.businessinsider.com/us-shale-oil-industry-vaporized-money-before-energy-markets-collapsed-2020-5.
2. www.tgs.com/well-and-subsurface-intel/2024-09-16.
3. www.iea.org/reports/oil-market-report-december-2025.
4. See www.cfr.org/article/new-us-national-security-strategy-prioritizes-western-hemisphere.
5. See thenextrecession.wordpress.com/2024/07/27/venezuela-the-end-game.

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What we fight for

■ Without organisation the working class is nothing; with the highest form of organisation it is everything.

■ There exists no real Communist Party today. There are many so-called ‘parties’ on the left. In reality they are confessional sects. Members who disagree with the prescribed ‘line’ are expected to gag themselves in public. Either that or face expulsion.

■ Communists operate according to the principles of democratic centralism. Through ongoing debate we seek to achieve unity in action and a common world outlook. As long as they support agreed actions, members should have the right to speak openly and form temporary or permanent factions.

■ Communists oppose all imperialist wars and occupations but constantly strive to bring to the fore the fundamental question - ending war is bound up with ending capitalism.

■ Communists are internationalists. Everywhere we strive for the closest unity and agreement of working class and progressive parties of all countries. We oppose every manifestation of national sectionalism. It is an internationalist duty to uphold the principle, ‘One state, one party’.

■ The working class must be organised globally. Without a global Communist Party, a Communist International, the struggle against capital is weakened and lacks coordination.

■ Communists have no interest apart from the working class as a whole. They differ only in recognising the importance of Marxism as a guide to practice. That theory is no dogma, but must be constantly added to and enriched.

■ Capitalism in its ceaseless search for profit puts the future of humanity at risk. Capitalism is synonymous with war, pollution, exploitation and crisis. As a global system capitalism can only be superseded globally.

■ The capitalist class will never willingly allow their wealth and power to be taken away by a parliamentary vote.

■ We will use the most militant methods objective circumstances allow to achieve a federal republic of England, Scotland and Wales, a united, federal Ireland and a United States of Europe.

■ Communists favour industrial unions. Bureaucracy and class compromise must be fought and the trade unions transformed into schools for communism.

■ Communists are champions of the oppressed. Women’s oppression, combating racism and chauvinism, and the struggle for peace and ecological sustainability are just as much working class questions as pay, trade union rights and demands for high-quality health, housing and education.

■ Socialism represents victory in the battle for democracy. It is the rule of the working class. Socialism is either democratic or, as with Stalin’s Soviet Union, it turns into its opposite.

■ Socialism is the first stage of the worldwide transition to communism - a system which knows neither wars, exploitation, money, classes, states nor nations. Communism is general freedom and the real beginning of human history.

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weekly worker



No trust in the state

Despite Elon Musk's climbdown, there is still talk of further legislation to restrict X and other social media platforms. But should the left trust Keir Starmer and Liz Kendall when it comes to policing online content?

Paul Demarty thinks not

It is strange, but all too predictable, that - of all the possible things to pick a fight with the United States over - our government has chosen AI-generated porn.

There has been a spate of cases where users of X - Elon Musk's rebranded Twitter - have used the app's built-in AI chatbot, Grok, to create lewd images. Grok can be instructed to remake any image on command. It is impossible to simply instruct it to make a woman in a picture naked, but, as always, carefully crafted prompts can work around such guardrails. You can tell it to put the woman in a bikini. Then, someone discovered, you can ask it, in various ways, to render the bikini extremely *thin*, or even demand a bikini made out of dental floss, and so forth.

In some cases, no doubt, this is used by some of the world's saddest men for masturbation. In others, it is simply another weapon in the endless war of all against all that is online political argument. Women caught in the act of posting progressive opinions can expect to find themselves dressed up in itsy-bitsy, teeny-weeny bikinis by cretinous rightwing trolls. Sometimes their bodies are bruised, or they are bound and gagged. It is, to be sure, not a terrifically edifying spectacle.

Orwellian

Since this activity violates a host of laws in the UK, including the recent Orwellian Online Safety Act, there is a push to take action against the app that many still call the 'hellsite'. Ultra-Blairite technology minister Liz Kendall has prodded Ofcom into investigating, and ministers openly threaten a ban. For now, Musk strikes a defiant pose, accusing Starmer's government of "fascism", which - given the general political atmosphere on X these days - is a bit rich.

It should come as no surprise to regular readers of this paper that we oppose further restrictions on online speech, just as we have always opposed clampdowns on online harassment, in the name of preserving liberty of political expression at large. Because the particular phenomenon at issue in the present context is grossly degenerate and morally contemptible, that is not a compelling reason to break from this policy: after all, there is always *some* pressing reason for action, and it is rarely completely made up. That said, it does raise particular questions: what, if anything, *is* to be done about this and other issues of 'online safety'? And - to be blunt - why are people on the internet such arseholes?!

To take the ban first, there is a simple general argument against restricting free expression in the name of safety, even in the name of the safety of those who are oppressed in some way or another. It can be posed most clearly with respect to criminal



Now promises to block bad actors

sanctions against, say, hate speech. When such a law is on the books, the problem is posed of determining whether some particular utterance or online post is 'hateful' to the appropriate criminal standard. This duty will always fall to the police and prosecutors. The question of whether hate speech should be criminalised, therefore, is *inescapably* reduced to the question of trust in the repressive apparatuses of the state.

Now, we are not precisely in the same situation with the X ban. Here there are not police involved in the literal sense, but rather the regulatory body, Ofcom. Yet the underlying issue is the same: Ofcom, after all, is no more under the control of the general population than Scotland Yard. Its decisions are made in the interests of the state.

It is the job of Marxists, however, to cultivate distrust of the bourgeois state, to erode - so far as possible - its legitimacy as an arbiter between contending forces in society, and ultimately replace its bureaucratic and repressive institutions with democratic means of administration and justice. If we trust the state to determine the acceptable limits of discourse, then we invite such perverse results as the near-criminalisation of pro-Palestinian agitation as 'anti-Semitic hate speech'. Ofcom, with its broad purview over media content, also has plenty of room to make mischief.

The ban has its more absurd aspects, too. After all, it would not actually prevent the general run of X users - overwhelmingly outside the UK - from *making* these images. It would merely prevent British victims from seeing them, and even then only British victims who lack the minimal technical competence required to sign up for a virtual private network (VPN) service. It makes sense, instead, only as part of a general drift towards regimes of generalised censorship, summed up in laws like the Online Safety Act.

The political right has set itself up as the 'resistance' to such censorship in recent years. Indeed, the Trump administration itself has repeatedly warned European powers against

attacking 'freedom of speech'. The matter even showed up in the administration's recent national security strategy document. Liberals and the left rightly point out that this is all laughably hypocritical, and the second Trump administration has so far proven itself far more censorious than any recent Democratic regime.

Yet the insincerity is not a reason for the left to dismiss concerns about censorship; if anything, it is the opposite. Starmer and co are assembling repressive institutions that, at the next time of asking, look nailed-on to be handed over to Nigel Farage or a suitably 'Faragified' Tory leader. That, alone, would be reason for concern. (Of course, Starmer is quite repressive and cop-brained enough himself already ...)

Abuse

If broad bans are to be opposed, where does that leave us with respect to these images? It should be said, first of all, that the bikini pics exist on a continuum with other kinds of online 'abuse' - by 'abuse' I mean merely interventions in public discussion that attempt to obtain victory other than by means of substantive persuasion. Instead, the 'abuser' attempts to construct, with apologies to Theresa May, a hostile environment for their opponent, such that the latter will simply drop out for the sake of their sanity. In this respect, there are many tactics available - mob-handed, mass denunciation (popular on the liberal left in the 2010s); death and rape threats (more popular on the right); doxxing (fairly universal); and so on.

For some such tactics, a criminal sanction is all but inescapable. A good example would be 'swatting' - the attacker makes a hoax report of a hostage situation at the target's home, hoping to trigger a police raid. A similar case could be made for actual revenge porn (the distribution of graphic images of the target), especially where that material has been obtained by unauthorised access to their private accounts. *Serious* death threats - where the attacker plausibly could carry out the threat - likewise.

Yet much else besides is simply not surgically distinguishable from fair comment. Take the common practice of exhorting one's opponent to commit suicide. Can this be *rigorously* distinguished from assertions of the form, 'If this politician lived in feudal Japan, he would have to commit *seppuku*' - or, indeed, the perfectly defensible statement (though I disagree with it as an opponent of the death penalty, even in such cases) that the architects of the Gaza genocide, or some other act of mass murder, should be tried and hanged? Though it is undoubtedly psychologically harmful to maintain an ever-growing kill list in one's mind, there cannot, in other words, be a *right* not to be wished dead without drastic infringements on discussions on - in this case - the legitimacy of the death penalty and the demands of personal honour. Remember that all this will be decided by PC Plod.

Synthetic revenge porn is more similar to the mob-handed denunciations of old. Both are effectively forms of vigilante justice - attempts to expel someone who has transgressed some norm by way of terrorising them. The porn images are, additionally, characteristically misogynistic (though men are sometimes the target: far-right trolls succeeded in inducing Grok to write an elaborate and extremely violent rape fantasy about the American liberal pundit, Will Stancil), but the social function of the act is similar.

It cannot be argued by any supporter of freedom of association that it is illegitimate for social groups to police their boundaries, and in any case it would be fruitless: such boundaries are probably ineliminable from human nature, never mind organised political disagreement. So who is to decide what is a legitimate or illegitimate method of doing so (excepting direct violence or other unproblematically criminal activity)? Again: PC Plod.

Bad culture

In fact, we need to take a wider view to get a grip on the problem, and we have to start by acknowledging that abuse is not really aberrant on modern social media: instead, it is the norm. The standard of political argument on platforms like X is abysmal. I have already had cause to refer to "the *common practice* of exhorting one's opponent to commit suicide" and, when *seriously* opposed viewpoints are contested, that is about as good as it gets, most of the time. Some worthwhile discussion happens among political near neighbours, but even that can readily degenerate into exchanges of barbed one-liners or mass denunciations, most absurdly in the 'circular firing squad' scenario (A denounces B, B denounces C, C denounces A).

The more radical question is thus:

why? There is an implicit answer that comes with the speech-policing approach to particular cases, and it is a fundamentally conservative answer. It takes for granted that this is, in some respect, simply a feature of how we are. As John Calvin said, the human condition is one of total depravity. Only the threat of sanction can get us to behave.

If this conservative view is true, then the socialist project is doomed, and we merely await the ultimate circular firing squad: generalised nuclear exchange. Of course, we can hardly deny that some people *have it in them* to behave in these ways: the evidence is before our eyes. Yet we need an alternative, and better, interpretation of these facts.

We can start from the commonplaces of modern media criticism. Social media is governed by the selections of the algorithms, and the algorithms are determined by the needs of the platforms as capitalist enterprises. They make money from showing adverts, and therefore their users must spend as much time as possible scrolling their feeds and looking at those adverts. Anxiety and rage does the trick better than sunshine and puppies, and so these platforms are characteristically unhappy places.

Perhaps more than the algorithms, though, there is the overall structure - millions of individual users in a single discursive space, their interactions mediated primarily by the platform itself. This is a recipe for atomisation, and consequently forms of political culture characterised by personal loyalty to favoured celebrities. The greatest example is, of course, Donald Trump, but very much smaller fry can become the object of such investment for smaller groups (*vide* Kamala Harris and her 'KHive' superfans).

Escaping this degenerate culture, then, is a matter of constructing *alternative institutional forms* that cut against atomisation and its necessarily Bonapartist consequences. Political comradeship and opposition would then not be mediated by the particular corporate interests of Elon Musk or Mark Zuckerberg, but by organisations built for the purpose - democratically organised parties, in short.

Yet the capitalist class has no need of parties in *this* sense. Indeed, mass-membership bourgeois parties largely exist in response to the parties of the one class that has *only* coherence in large numbers to rely on: the working class. It is *our* job, in other words, to provide the alternative, both as a programme for social transformation *and* as a living body that, somehow, models a better and democratic culture of political contestation.

We cannot leave it to Ofcom, or Musk, or PC Plod! ●

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